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Parent-Teacher Engagement During Child-Centered Pedgogial Change in Elementary School: The Lived Experiences of Teachers and Involved Parents

Cristiana P. White

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**PARENT-TEACHER ENGAGEMENT DURING CHILD-CENTERED
PEDAGOGICAL CHANGE IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: THE LIVED
EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS AND INVOLVED PARENTS**

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education submitted to the Executive Doctoral Program in
Counselor Education and Supervision School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
The degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Cristiana Perez White, M.S.W., LCSW

August 2014

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Cristiana Pérez White, M.S.W., LCSW

2014

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
Department of Counseling, Psychology and Special Education

Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)

Executive Counselor Education and Supervision Program

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PEDAGOGICAL CHANGE IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. THE LIVED
EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS AND INVOLVED PARENTS

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ABSTRACT

PARENT-TEACHER ENGAGEMENT DURING CHILD-CENTERED PEDAGOGICAL CHANGE IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS AND INVOLVED PARENTS

By

Cristiana Perez White, M.S.W., LCSW

August 2014

Dissertation Supervised by Dr. Lisa Lopez Levers

With the advance of technology as a manifestation of our rapidly changing world, we often hear how difficult it is to be a parent with school-age children. The more knowledge and access parents have to technology, the better position they are in to collaborate with teachers and to help their children academically and behaviorally. However, the lack of updated technology may be a serious concern for children living in poverty. For these and many other reasons, it is imperative that educators provide parents with the knowledge base and the resources needed to facilitate parent engagement in helping their children with their learning process. While the current literature overwhelmingly demonstrates that parents need to be involved in their children's schooling, it has little to say about what it really means for parents to be thus involved.

The aim of this qualitative phenomenological-existential study was to examine the lived experiences of eight teachers and nine parents in an urban elementary school in Western Pennsylvania in the course of both architectural and pedagogical changes. The

study was intended to examine how parent-teacher engagement manifests itself, and it was carried out through interviews with questions designed to elicit both teacher and parent expectations for themselves, for each other, and for their children. The data was gleaned from two focus groups, one teacher and one parent, and six key informant interviews with three teachers and three parents.

Three overriding themes emerged from the data analysis: the need for communication, a desire for human empathy, and felt oppression. These themes evolved in a theoretical framework that includes van Manen's (1990) four lived existentials, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) risk and protective factors from his notions about the ecology of human development, and Freire's (1970) ideas about the pedagogy of the oppressed. Some prospective hypotheses were derived from this research, as well as further implications of the study and ideas for future research and intervention.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Manuel Bacilio Pérez Beltre and my mother, Leonidas Joaquina Batista de Pérez. They set clear expectations, believed in me and gave me the support and freedom to explore the world and become the person I am today.

Thanks!

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As I reflect on my journey in accomplishing this doctoral degree, I feel profoundly grateful to many people, to whom I present these acknowledgements. First, to my dissertation chair, Dr. Lisa Lopez Levers, whose guidance and support were instrumental in the fulfilling of this dream: I am thankful to you for re-introducing me to the world of philosophy, specifically for exposing me to the field of phenomenology.

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There are two people in particular to whom I wish to express my gratitude for making this an amazing journey. I perceive life as a very high mountain — a mountain that I always wanted to climb, right to the top. Throughout my life I have come in contact with many people that have believed in me and inspired me to go beyond what I thought was possible. I was profoundly inspired by Miss Grace Danylo with her passionate way of teaching reading to her students; she influenced me and motivated me to go after my long-time dream of attaining a doctoral degree, although doing so requires the arduous work of writing a dissertation—and having English as a second language can be intimidating at times. It has been a delightful learning experience, thanks to the extraordinary work of my editor, Ardella Crawford, who helped me to put into written words the essence of this study.

I am most grateful to my family, particularly to my son. Eric, my apologies to you for neglecting you and leaving you almost on your own throughout your college years. I am proud you pulled it through and graduated from college before me. You are a really awesome young man, and I wish you the best in your professional and other life endeavors.

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CHAPTER I: THE PROBLEM

Referencing the period from 1750 to the 1920s, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, asserted that “[t]he only genuine basis for popular, national culture, and poor relief, is parental sympathy” (Pestalozzi, 1977, p. 204). Pestalozzi indicated that the mother is a natural teacher who instills the confidence of love in the heart of her children. In the home, children find the harmony and direction needed to develop their human capacities. Pestalozzi asserted that “one great evil of modern times which is a serious obstacle to progress is the fact that parents have lost the conviction that they themselves can do anything in the education of their children” (p. 209). Parents’ conviction must be restored; they need to understand that the education of their children is their main concern, rather than the schools’. The aim of administrators and educators should be to establish an intimate relationship between education at school and at home (Pestalozzi, 1977, p. 2005).

Relationships are the “heart” of human interaction in the world; a person’s relationships set the stage for success or disruption. If the needs of the individual in our diverse, changing world are to be met universally, intentional and mindful interactions must be exercised according to Paulo Freire’s (1970) praxis prescription, which entails practice and reflection. In this regard, Siegel (2010) asserts that

[w]e look inward to know our own internal world before we can map clearly the internal state, the mind, of the other. As we grow in our ability to know ourselves, we become receptive to knowing each other. And as a “we” is woven into the neurons of our mirroring brains, even our sense of self is illuminated by the light of our connection. With internal awareness and empathy, self-empowerment and

joining, differentiation and linkage, we create harmony within the resonating circuits of our social brains. (p. 231)

Parental involvement has been researched by many scholars. Researchers from diverse fields (education, sociology, and mental health) have indicated the need for better working relationships between schools and home, especially in urban communities. Because parents, particularly mothers, are the first teachers in a child's life, parent/child relationships have been found to be a strong indicator in children's social/emotional and academic success. Such success can be enhanced by the "synergistic" teamwork of parents and teachers. This collaborative work must furnish direction, knowledge, resources, and support in a safe and empathic environment (Cox, 1988).

Historical Background of the Problem

In the United States, concern for students' academic performance is a long-standing problem. In 1981, T. H. Bell, the Secretary of Education, directed the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) to examine the quality of education in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). In 1983 the NCEE's examination resulted in a report, *A Nation at Risk*, in which the commission called for fundamental changes in the American educational system to renew the nation's commitment to schools and colleges of high quality nationwide (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). The NCEE provided a set of recommendations, including the most necessary improvements. These included strengthening graduation requirements, more rigorous and measurable standards and expectations, longer time devoted to study, improvement in teacher preparation, better accountability of school administrators, and appropriate fiscal support from citizens (U. S. Department of Education 1999) The NCEE

members pled for support from all sectors of education at the national, state, and local levels, and asked parents, teachers, and students, as well as colleges, universities, and industrial and labor councils, to take responsibility for the reform of educational institutions. A major portion of the NCEE report affected teachers, who naturally were charged with a large part of the responsibility for improving students' academic performance. The NCEE report resulted in a federal law known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; U. S. Department of Education, 2002b), which holds public school leaders and teachers accountable for students' academic achievement. The NCLB law mandated that schools must make changes at all levels of the institution. The NCEE report (U. S. Department, 1999) did not predict possible changes teachers might encounter while implementing the commission's recommendations or how the reform process could affect the lived experiences of teachers.

In the year 2002b, the first year of George W. Bush's presidency, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was implemented and signed into law. President Bush considered this one of the greatest achievements of his 8 years in the White House (McGuinn, 2006). In 2002, the NCLB was reauthorized. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was then implemented at the federal level, affecting education from kindergarten through high school. The NCLB is built on four principles: (a) accountability for results; (b) more choices for parents; (c) greater local control and flexibility; and (d) an emphasis on doing what works, based on scientific research. The goal of NCLB is to close achievement gaps by ensuring academic progress for every child. Public schools around the United States are held accountable for adequate yearly progress (AYP) through mandated yearly assessment for all students in grades 3–8. This

requirement put all public schools under tremendous pressure for two reasons. First, school districts that fail to make adequate AYP are subject to corrective action. Second, schools that are successful at meeting AYP are eligible for state academic achievement awards (U.S. Department of Education, 2002b).

Pennsylvania Public Education

The quality of Pennsylvania public education continues to be a long-standing concern for educators, administrators, and the public in general. The federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, implemented to fix the problem, is not proving to be effective, particularly in meeting the needs of the disenfranchised and special-needs students in Pennsylvania, as well as in many public schools across the country (Smeaton & Waters, 2008). Research has overwhelmingly demonstrated that the public wants schools to be successful at providing students with the knowledge and skills they will need in order to perform well (Epstein, 2011, 1987; Hoover-Dempsey & Brissie, 1987; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Muller & Kerbow, 1993). However, establishing an effective curriculum and measurement of educational progress is a challenge for many schools, particularly urban schools.

According to a 2008 review of the 2005-2006 Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) report on Pennsylvania schools, performance in academic achievement, participation, student attendance, graduation, and safety shows that the schools have, in general, demonstrated positive trends. However, in several areas related to student achievement in subgroups, some problems deserve attention. Urban schools must meet the NCLB mandates in five areas: academic achievement, graduation/attendance rates, participation, school safety, and teacher qualification. Findings (Smeaton & Waters,

2008) indicate that in urban schools, the major challenges administrators often encounter are maintaining the special education subgroup, funding, unrealistic goals or proficiency, and untimely reporting of PSSA results. Smeaton & Waters (2008) point to two important issues: First, urban schools tend to focus more than do rural schools on a broad spectrum of subgroups, and this difference affects the way funding streams are categorized. Second, urban schools have complex infrastructures.

The Pennsylvania accountability requirements include the following:

1. Academic achievement: 94.5% of the student population must participate in the PSSA testing; graduate rates to be a minimum of 80% of 12th graders who begin the school year.
 2. Highly qualified teachers: must hold full or intern certification, have completed the content area as a major, have passed the Praxis II content area test(s), have completed or enrolled in teacher education coursework, and have earned a bachelor's degree.
 3. Student attendance, as measured in grades 1-8, must be at 90%.
 4. School safety reports to be generated annually concerning the number and type of dangerous incidents occurring on-site. Persistently dangerous depends on the size of the school population and number of incidents.
- (PDE, 2008)

Current data reflected in PDE's state report card indicate that Pennsylvania has not been successful in meeting the challenges of ensuring that all groups of students are learning at the rate they should. Pennsylvania faces a large achievement gap among specific subgroups Smeaton & Waters (PDE, 2005b). The findings provide a clear view

of how Pennsylvania schools are succeeding in meeting the NCLB mandates, and analyses of the data provide a picture of the continuing needs of these schools. Smeaton & Waters (2008) have found that while most schools are currently meeting the NCLB mandates, both rural and urban administrators are very concerned about being able to meet the mandates as the requirements increase in the next few years. They believe 100% proficiency by 2014 is unrealistic (Smeaton & Waters, 2008).

A Pennsylvania Urban Elementary School

The urban elementary school subject of this study, which is located in western Pennsylvania, is no exception regarding the ability to meet mandates. It is a Title 1 school that serves a diverse population and disenfranchised children and their families. This is a low-achieving school, which has been in financial distress under Act 47 since 1988 and is presently on a financial watch list under Act 141 of 2012. This community also suffers from constrained economic development. Prior to 1984, the main source of employment and family income in this school community was from steel production, heavy metals manufacturing, and other jobs related to these industries. The decline of these businesses, especially the steel mills, resulted in plunging family incomes, escalating crime, and the mass exodus of residents from the community. The loss of individual and family income, coupled with a drastic reduction in tax revenue, has had a major impact on the district and community. The total estimated population is 9,438. The racial mixture is 57.6% black, 38.6% white, 1.3% Hispanic, 0.4% Asian, 0.2% native Hawaiian, and 0.1% American Indian (US Census, 2010). The US Census reports that over 44% of the local families have a combined household income under \$25,000. The total number of households is 4,260; there are 2,573 (60.4%) two-parent households (families), 13.4% single-female

parent households with children under 18 years, and 1.1% with single-male parents. There are 144 single grandparent households, 80% of these being female grandparents and 40% male, who are fully responsible for care of their grandchildren. The U.S. Census also reports approximately 1,845 children under 18 years old who are enrolled in school: 5.3% of them are enrolled in nursery/preschool, 5.9% of them are in kindergarten and 46.9% of them in the elementary school grades 1-8 (U. S. Census, 2010). According to Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera (2010) and Lee (2005), disenfranchised minority students are more likely to attend schools that experience lower resources, frequent staff turnover, and higher unqualified teachers. This community has two high environmental risk factors of major concern. The first is the low level of educational attainment in the adult population: 3.4% have less than a ninth-grade education and only 9.9% have graduated from secondary school. Second, about 21.3% of the total population is below poverty level (U. S. Census, 2010).

This Western Pennsylvania school district operates two buildings, an elementary school that serves grades K through 6, with 60 teachers, and the junior/senior high school that serves grades 7 through 12, with 39 teachers. Both the elementary and the junior/senior high school student body population are fairly diverse. The elementary school offers educational programming for approximately 672 students, K-6. There are 5 Asian students, 483 African American, 8 Hispanic, 34 multiracial, and 155 Caucasian. Out of these 672 students, two are receiving English Second Language (ESL) learner services, and 121 students have an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP). In this Western Pennsylvania School District, the junior/senior high school has an enrollment of

approximately 514 students; of these, 86% are economically disadvantaged, 18% are students with an IEP, and 81% belong to the African American subgroup.

(Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2010).

According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP, 2010), in Pennsylvania there are 1,486,013 families with 2,746,894 children living in poverty. Of these, 29% are White, 65% African American, 64% Hispanic, and 30% Asian. Many scholars, including Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera (2010) and Lee (2005), have asserted that low-income students often live in poor neighborhoods with limited public resources, economic investment, and political power. These communities are exposed to violent events, which negatively influence the children's ability to be successful at school, both behaviorally and academically. Wood (2003) observed that these communities lack the resources to provide students with needed after-school programs to facilitate their intellectual, emotional, and physical development.

The Influence of Multicultural Factors

Because of rapidly increasing diversity in the United States, there is a need to develop culturally sensitive approaches to meet the needs of disenfranchised children and their families effectively (Harry, 2008; Koppelman, 2011; Noguera, 2010, 2008, 2006, 2004, 2003). According to Delpit (2006, 2002), educators working with students and parents tend to use the norms of middle-class White parents to evaluate parents from low-income, racial/ethnic minority, and English as a Second Language learners (ELL) backgrounds (Cooper, 2009). Lack of awareness of cultural sensitivity and diversity, and focusing on "Anglo" parenting attitudes and techniques, decrease the presence of culturally diverse parents in schools and help to discourage the educators who are

educating their children (Delpit, 2006, 2002; Cooper, 2009; Wood III & Baker, 1999). Students who are low-income, poorly educated, and of a racial or ethnic minority, as well as those who have parents with limited English proficiency, are more likely to abstain from participating in and engaging with their schoolwork to meet their schools' demands (Fass & Cauthen, 2008). These children and their families are more likely to experience schools as unwelcoming and to experience feelings of school exclusion (Bryan & Henry, 2008; Harry, Klinger, & Hart, 2005). Students from disenfranchised families are more likely to have low academic performance, to experience frequent disciplinary referrals, and to be over-represented in special education (Bryan & Henry, 2008; Harry, Klinger, & Hart, 2005; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Disciplinary referral patterns because of the students' disruptive behavior in the classroom have shown that the probability that English teachers will refer African American students to school counselors was almost three times greater than for White students (Bryan, Da-Vines, Griffin & Moore-Thomas, 2012).

The negative perception of these students by teachers may have originated from cultural insensitivity and embedded prejudices toward low income and disenfranchised students and may contribute to disproportional student referrals, which may result in low academic achievement (Bryan et al. 2012). The experiences of parents and their children from low income and racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds emphasize the need for schools to adapt culturally responsive approaches in working with parents and to help parents who may be marginalized (Bryan, et al., 2012).

According to Koppelman (2011) multicultural education is “a journey that leads students to self-discovery and to a sense of personal efficacy” (p. 21). According to

Koppelman (2011), “the future of our diverse society will depend on how schools educate the coming generations, and pluralism must be a significant factor in that education” (p. 320). The research literature has addressed multiculturalism as a topic of profound importance in relationship and teaching processes (Delpit, 2002, 2006; Gonzalez-Mena, 2013; Howard, 2006, 2010; King, 1968; Koppelman, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2004; Noguera, 2006, 2008; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard III, 2003). Multiculturalism and its impact in the education of the children will be examined more in depth in the subsequent chapters.

McLaren (2009) provided three points from the literature to illuminate the political logic underlying various cultural and power relations:

Culture is intimately connected with the structure of social relations within class, gender, and age formations that give forms of oppression and dependency.

Culture is analyzed as a form of production through which different groups in either their dominant or subordinate social relations define and realize their aspirations through unequal relations of power.

Culture is viewed as a field of struggle in which the production, legitimization, and circulation of particular forms of knowledge and experience are central areas of conflict.

Problems Specific to the School

In the small, Western Pennsylvania urban school community chosen for study, the people experience daily socio-economic troubles similar to those found in major urban cities: adult and juvenile crime, single-parent homes, lack of resources, a high rate of unemployment, and high numbers of teen parents. In this financially distressed school

district, meeting the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) examination standards is a challenge. Administering the test creates a time of intense anxiety and despair among teachers, school administrators, and students. Added to lack of parental involvement are the problems of a limited school budget and insufficient human resources to meet the overwhelming needs of the students and their families.

Despite the training and interventions that have been implemented at all levels of the school system, progress in terms of parental involvement is still limited. However, this school district recognizes the importance of parental involvement and provides different activities to involve parents and the community. These activities include a Dad's Day, in which fathers are engaged in an interactive learning activity with their kindergarten children; a once-a-year, all-day reading program; and a math game activity. The school provides a study/computer room in the school library where parents are welcome to visit to check out books and to use the computer to search educational information. The district also brings in speakers to talk to the parents. For example, the two most popular and well-attended events are the classroom reading and game events. The most involved activities are sporting events. This school district is known for its excellence in sports, particularly basketball and football.

In the counseling department, parents are actively involved in the school's Counseling Advisory Committee. Parents also are involved in driving their children early to school to participate in the Spanish Club before classes begin. Thus, a high number of students (60) enroll every year. Spanish Club is a once-a-week event, and around 20 to 25 students regularly attend this event regardless of the weather conditions. Nevertheless, students continue to experience difficulties with school attendance, behavior, and

academic performance. A qualitative phenomenological study of teacher-parent engagement during a child-centered pedagogical change in an elementary school to examine the lived experiences of teachers and involved parents may produce valuable information to help strengthen and support family engagement (U. S. Department of Education, 2010).

Changing schools. Over the years the administrators at this Western Pennsylvania School District have implemented school and curriculum reform. These changes have been inconsistent, mostly because of the typical budgetary issues of public schools. In 2009, the district administrators hired an administrative leadership/coaching consultant, Dr. Horacio Sanchez, President of Resiliency, Inc., of North Carolina Resiliency, Inc., to provide training and coaching to school administrators to help them learn how to implement change successfully and to work better with staff members from diverse backgrounds. This organization's training teaches school administrators the most effective strategies for establishing high performance programs, using a neurobiologically based approach to help students close the achievement gap. The coaching addresses several aspects by implementing programmatic changes, effective supervision, managing people, student discipline methods, ways to evaluate organizational capability, and effective use of data to drive change. The goal was to improve school climate to enhance student achievement.

The school district also hired the training and consulting services of an expert in counseling. This expert's job is to implement a school-wide positive behavior plan and to restructure the counseling department so that it approximates the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model. The purpose of the school district's

curriculum action plan is to establish clear guidelines for academic and social behavior. By using this discipline in a positive, supportive, logical, and consistent manner, the leaders of the district hope to teach students effective means for showing a sense of purpose, accountability, respect, and commitment. The goal is to prepare the students to be productive citizens of society.

In 2010, the school district brought in a consultant, Mutiu Fagbayi, from Performance Fact, Inc., a culturally diverse team of professionals with proven expertise in teaching, research, educational leadership, and organizational development. This organization's main commitment is to support educational leaders with a system of solutions for building stronger schools and accelerating learning for all students. The focus is on the following goal: To accelerate student learning through continuous improvement of professional practices that reflect, plan, and lead with regard to organizational, leadership, and teaching practices, and in terms of student learning. This consultant worked with the school district for two years. During the first year, frequent meetings and intense workshop sessions were held with a selected group of teachers; volunteer teachers, parents, and other members of the community were included. In these meetings, a four-pillar rubric encompassing 16 high-leverage practices for eye-on-the-goal was developed. A document was published listing common goals and performance objectives. The second year consisted of frequent phone consultation between the consultant and the administrators. From the second year emerged a comprehensive plan; the Title I and Keystone to Opportunities (KtO) Plan instructs the teachers what to teach and when, and provides a sequence of learning from K-12.

This urban elementary school is a school-wide Title I school with an enrollment of 692 students; 92% of the students qualify for the free/reduced lunch program, and 77% of the students are ethnic minorities. Parental involvement is a mandatory component of Title I; therefore, this urban school combines KtO efforts with Title I to avoid overlap or contradiction in terms of family involvement.

The school mission is to prepare students for college, career, and productive global citizenship by fostering academic achievement in a supportive and challenging learning community. To achieve the District Vision, the school will provide five components: a standards-based, aligned and articulated curriculum; a school community that respects diversity; a highly qualified staff; professional development to enhance student achievement; and a school where staff, parents, and community work together to improve student achievement. The KtO Grant has endorsed this urban school's effort to engage parents and families in partnering with the district in raising literacy awareness in the community. A team of leaders, including the principals at the elementary school, developed a plan they called "Together." This plan is a parent engagement initiative of KtO that is committed to making the school and families active partners in increasing student achievement. "Coming Together" is the planning and implementation that looks at the processes necessary to bring the staff and families together to support children through the educational process, using a team approach. The measurement results indicate that all the components of this initiative are making strides in a positive direction and providing a clear, concise, focused mission for and vision of an active parent-school partnership.

A committee of volunteers, teachers, parents, and community members applied for and received a scholarship to attend an Enhancing Family Engagement Training Series as part of the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN). “Together” activities, which establish and build respectful and trusting social relationships with children and their families, are an essential element in any effort to improve urban education. The “Together” initiative includes a series of events:

1. *Parent-teacher conferences*. Teachers maintaining an open line of communication through the use of daily logs/homework journals and weekly phone updates and teachers making at least four phone calls to parents a week to address or celebrate behavior or academic successes;
2. *ALARM*. A vocabulary activity for students in the PASSA grades and their families;
3. *Story Walk*. A literacy-based program for families of students in HeadStart through 3rd grade;
4. *Family Literacy Nights*. A series of six two-hour evening events for students and parents where teachers read selected books and model questioning, recall, prediction, and best literacy strategies, followed by a family hands-on activity based on the themed selections;
5. *HeadStart Literacy Night*. Based on the *Family Literacy Night* format but focused on developing literacy and numeracy skills; and,
6. *Take a Book Home & Read*. Reaches out to all the elementary school families by providing grade appropriate books to every child in the building six times throughout the year.

In 2013/2014 the district invited a consultant from aha! Process, Inc. a company funded by Ruby Payne to inform schools, companies, and other organizations about poverty. Ruby Payne is an international speaker, publisher, and author of *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, which is her work on the culture of poverty and its relation to education. The consult provided two days of workshop sessions to teachers and administrators. The goal was for teachers and administrators to gain a better understanding of the challenges of working with children in poverty.

Parental Involvement

According to Chase-Lansdale, Mott, Brooks-Gunn, and Phillips (1991), in the United States longitudinal studies in which children are the participants started in the late 1970s. A major breakthrough took place when the National Longitudinal Study of Youth (NLSY) added a child supplement (NLSY-CS) whereby a sample of female children, who were assessed through their childhood years and who became mothers, were followed in conjunction with their babies (Baydar & Brooks-Gunn, 1991). The collected data were used to examine the effect of many socioeconomic and demographic variables upon children's math and reading achievement and their behavioral problems. Parental and family-level data are collated to study the ways early childhood programs influence aspects of parental behavior, whether the efficacy of early programs for child well-being is mediated by such programs' effects on parental behavior, and whether mediated effects occur for some subgroups or families or children (Brooks-Gunn, Berlin, Leventhal, & Fuligni, 2000).

Parental involvement is a concept of profound importance in many settings but particularly in public education, where educators, policymakers, and researchers have yet

to decide upon a clear definition for it. This term encompasses many different activities, ranging from a personal visit to school once a year, to frequent parent-teacher consultations, to active school governorship (Brito & Walker, 1994). According to Georgiou (1997), many problems in the empirical literature on parental involvement need to be addressed. Among these problems are the complexity and confusion caused by the absence of a clear definition of the term *parental involvement*. Though lacking conceptual and clear definition, the term usually refers to a variety of parental behaviors that directly or indirectly affect a child's learning and behavior (Fantuzzo, Davis, & Ginsberg, 1995). Bakker & Denessen (2007) asserted that "like many other concepts in the social sciences, parental involvement is a value loaded term" (p. 188). Georgiou (1997) said that in spite of the incongruence in operationally defining parental involvement, a large number of researchers would agree with the typology proposed by Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon (1997). Under this typology, parental involvement has five levels, which include parenting, helping with homework, communicating with the school, volunteering at school and participating in school decision making.

According to Englund, Luckner, Whaley, and Egeland (2004), the focus on parental involvement has been precipitated by findings that point to the positive impact of parental involvement on children's academic achievement. Mahoney et al. (1999) said that parent involvement is critical to early intervention effectiveness and that parents want information about specific ways they can help their children's development. An extensive body of literature conveys the effect of parental involvement on children's schooling success (Christenson, Rounds & Gorney, 1992; Epstein, 1992; Kleith et al.,

1998); thus, the key to needed change in schools is involving the parents, the importance of parental involvement in children's education having been abundantly documented in the professional literature (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989; Wherry, 2012).

The NCLB under Title 1 defined parental involvement as “the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities” (U. S. Department of Education, 2004, p. 3). These other activities include parents' assisting their child's learning, being actively involved in their child's education at school, and collaborating in decision making and on advisory committees.

Chavkin and Williams (1987) reported the results of a survey of parents and educators in six southern states on parental involvement. Respondents provided views on parental involvement in decision-making, parental involvement roles, and parental involvement activities, as well as on the involvement of parents in general. In 1980–1981, Joyce L. Epstein (director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnership and National Network of Partnership Schools, and principal research scientist, and research professor of sociology at Johns Hopkins University) and colleagues did a statewide survey of 600 elementary schools in Maryland, examining the following:

- How often and in what ways teachers and their schools involved parents
- How parents' social class and marital status affected their involvement
- How students in the elementary school understood and reacted to connections between their families and teachers
- The results of partnerships on the attitudes and practices of teachers, the actions and behaviors of parents, and the attitudes and achievements of students.

According to Epstein (2011) these studies provided systematic, quantitative analyses of the nature and extent of family involvement in the elementary grades. The findings raised many questions about existing theories of effective school organizations, families, and communities that led to the development of the theory of overlapping spheres of influence. In 1987, Epstein et al. also did field studies with educators, families, and students in urban elementary and middle schools in Baltimore, Maryland. Their findings helped to increase awareness of how involvement changes across the grades, by teachers of different subjects, for parents from various racial and cultural groups, and in schools that are guided to organize their programs of partnership systematically with families and communities. Epstein's and Coleman's prolific work is very frequently cited by many professionals in education and related fields.

Parental Influence on Student Achievement

Many researchers have shown that the level of parental involvement in their child's school affects student achievement (Bandy & Moore, 2008; Cotton & Wiklund, 2001; El Nokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drzal, 2010; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2001-2004; O'Connor & McCartney, 2007; Schneider & Coleman, 1993; Wherry, 2003). Henderson and Mapp's (2002) research confirmed that "the evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and through life" (p. 7). These scholars assert that students with involved parents, regardless of their income or background were more likely to be successful with social, academic, and future career endeavors. Thus it would seem that schools should provide programs for parents of low-performing children to learn new skills and

techniques, which would lead to parents' increased capacity when working with their children at home (NCLB, 2002).

The Pennsylvania public education system is in desperate need of finding effective ways to help students achieve success with their schooling. In addition to the large body of data indicating the valuable influence of parents' involvement in their children's education, research also points to the important role of parental involvement in assisting the educational system with its struggles to help students improve their academic achievement. Among the many universal social and demographic influential factors, a modern concern, particularly in the United States, is the increase in diversity, which involves such issues as language barriers that can have a tremendous impact on the social structure of many systems, particularly the educational system. Another important factor is the advance of technology. Almost everyone has iPods, computers, cell phones, and huge selections of appealing electronic games (Benson, 1975), which have the potential to hinder a child's academic performance. These elements have created a profound concern for educational leaders, parents, and society as a whole. It is imperative for all concerned parties to unite and work together toward a common goal of helping students to develop their potential. In order to move forward, we need to have first-hand input from teachers and parents, as they are major agents of change. Pestalozzi (1977) and Bronfenbrenner (1974b, 1986), among other experts, perceived elementary school teachers and parents as among the most important people in children's lives and in their development. It is essential that parents become aware of this role so that they can effectively and efficiently help children who are attending a school that is undergoing child-centered pedagogical changes.

This notion of the importance of parental involvement for student achievement is supported by Wherry's (2003) summaries of research findings regarding parent school involvement, which document the following benefits:

- Students achieve higher academics, better attendance, fewer special education placements, and higher graduation rates.
- Parents demonstrate greater confidence in the school and in their own ability to help their children learn, and recognize the possibility of pursuing their own educational opportunities.
- Teachers experience improved morale, receive higher ratings from parents, and have more support from families and the community, resulting in a better reputation for the school.

Statement of the Problem

The problem for this study has two interrelated parts. First, school administrators and teachers are required to implement continual pedagogical change for the improvement of student academic achievement (U. S. Department of Education, 2002; Epstein 2005). The urban elementary school at which this study was conducted is a low-performance, financially distressed, Title I school that consistently struggles to close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and minority students and their peers. The implementation of change is costly and time consuming (Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center, 2006). Under the NCLB (2002) mandates, if school change does not lead to improvement in the students' academic achievement, the school faces severe consequences, such as being in a watch list until students show progress, closure of the

school if there is a consistent lack of progress, or state takeover of governance (U. S. Department of Education, 2002).

Second, this small urban community faces social and economic hardships similar to those normally found in major urban cities. In this community, major concerns include unemployment, deteriorating housing, violent crime, single parents, and a tremendous lack of resources for promoting the mental and physical wellbeing of the children and their families, as well as other demographic and social-economic and health factors. Teachers often complain that parents are not involved in their children's education, whereas parents express that the teachers need to take the responsibility for education the children.

The Purpose of this Study

This study has sought to explore the teacher and parent perceptions of each other's roles and the way in which parent-teacher engagement becomes manifest as they both help students with their academic achievement. Defining the role of teachers and parents is essential, especially when the school is undergoing pedagogical change. At such a time, misperceptions on the part of both parents and teachers become apparent because the children may struggle academically through this time of change. Parents may blame the teachers for not accomplishing these transitions successfully, and teachers may blame the parents for not providing support in the home. Situations like this reveal the parents' and teachers' perceptions of one another's role in the children's education are incongruous. Parent-teacher engagement may involve frustration and even hostility in such a case. Using qualitative methodology, I examined the lived experiences of approximately six to ten parents and six to ten teachers at an elementary school in

Pennsylvania. The goal of this study was to examine the relationship between parents and teachers at their children's school while the school is undergoing a child-centered pedagogical change in order to identify, if possible, the causes of the misunderstandings that sometimes occur. Such identification will require an examination of the attitudes and perceptions among K-6 grade teachers and parents about their respective roles in the children's education and the discovery of common emerging themes.

Of particular interest was examining the interpersonal and intrapersonal processes arising from the daily academic demands upon the students. What is the experience of teachers and parents as they work with the children to meet their academic demands, and how do they perceive one another's roles in helping students with their academic endeavors? This study also examined parental involvement and attempted to show how the recent efforts of the school district's new curriculum enhancement and teacher training have affected the students' academic achievement. Qualitative methods are the most appropriate for measuring parents' and teachers' lived experiences, and interviewing parents and teachers in depth for their own accounts of their behaviors is the best guarantee for detecting the hidden features of their involvement in their children's education (Bakker & Denessen, 2007).

Identifying causes of the lack of congruity between parents' and teachers' perceptions of their roles in children's education necessitates consideration of the risk factors in the children's lives. Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 2005) bioecological model, which has informed this study, emphasized the importance of examining the risk and protective factors associated with human development. Bronfenbrenner asserted that risk factors are events in one's life that may potentially interrupt what would otherwise be normal human

development. For children, their parents' divorce, parental unemployment, living in a single-parent home, a parent's incarceration, parent/child relationship conflict, and so forth, might all be considered risk factors for precipitating stress. Bronfenbrenner identified protective factors, as well. These protective factors are events that can serve to defend a person from the potentially harmful influence of risk factors. In the case of a student's behavioral or academic failure, for example, peers or strong supervision might serve as protective factors from educational failure.

Knowledge gathered from this study is intended to add to the body of research on educational change and leadership. The findings of the study may inform educational policymakers and change agents of unknown factors important to the success of major school changes. A qualitative, phenomenologically oriented inquiry is appropriate for studying the problem of incongruous perceptions on the part of parents and teachers because this type of research design allows the researcher to conduct an in-depth exploration of teachers' and parents' lived experiences during major child-centered pedagogical changes at school (Creswell, 2005, 2007; Merriam, 2009; van Manen, 1990). In-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with teachers and with parents who have children attending elementary school. The research findings from the participants' contributions generated research questions that may contribute to future quantitative studies (Creswell, 2005).

Significance of the Study

Knowing how parents and teachers perceive the role of parental involvement in supporting children who are attending a school that is undergoing child-centered pedagogical changes is of great significance. This knowledge is particularly important for

policy makers, school administrators, teachers, and school counselors. From the school counselor's perspective, understanding the real-life experiences of teachers and parents, especially in the elementary school setting, is of paramount importance. A child's most formative stage is during elementary school. This study may prove central to helping shape the roles and expectations of the parents and teachers in this school setting. The essence of parents' and teachers' respective roles in an urban school undergoing pedagogical changes has not been examined in the scholarly literature. Especially for school administrators, it is critical to understand the unique experience of being a teacher or a parent of an elementary school age child. The school, in order to select the best teachers and staff, and to provide adequate on-going training and resources, needs to find effective ways of working with parents to help a child to be successful at school. If they want to be effective, parents and teachers must have a clear understanding of their respective roles, of their experiences, both at home and at school, and of any other systems directly or indirectly involved in the life of the child.

In studies of reform efforts, few researchers have focused on teachers' lived experiences during a major reform process (Evans, 2001; Fullan, 2007a). The themes generated from the literature about the lived experiences of teachers during educational reform may represent new insights for educational researchers and leaders, and may well contribute to more successful change efforts (Fullan, 2007a). From a school counselor's perspective, understanding the lived experience of the parents and teachers when the school is undergoing a child-centered pedagogical change is of paramount importance for the academic success of the students. How teachers perceive the role of the parents in supporting children when the school is undergoing pedagogical change and how

engagement between teachers and parents manifests itself have not been examined in the scholarly literature.

Changes in the educational field are usually geared toward addressing the problem of students' poor academic performance in core subjects (U.S. Department of Education, 2002b). For changes to be effective, parental involvement at the planning level is fundamental. Freire (1970) noted,

A revolutionary leadership must accordingly practice co-intentional education.

Teachers (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. (p. 69)

As they attain this knowledge, through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators. In this way, “the presence of the oppressed in the struggle for their liberation will be what it should be: not pseudo-participation, but committed involvement” (Freire, 1970, p. 69). In regard to parental involvement, Freire (1993) asserted that the essence of participating is “to discuss, to have voice, acquiring it through the educational politics of schools and the reorganization of their budgets” (p. 124)—not simply to be asked to help maintain the school.

A qualitative method is appropriate for uncovering the human side of school change through an exploration of teachers' and parents' lived experiences. Little is known about the human side of change. Findings from a qualitative study can help leaders understand teachers' and parents' perspectives on the process of educational change and may uncover the personal meanings of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2005, 2007; Merriam, 2009; van Manen, 1990). The goal of qualitative research is eliciting the

participants' rather than the researcher's point of view (Creswell, 2005, 2007; Merriam, 2009; van Manen, 1990). Identifying and describing the challenges teachers and parents experience in relation to child-centered pedagogical changes is necessary.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study comprises several strands, which include the following: existential phenomenology, the bio-ecological model of human development, critical pedagogical theory, and critical pedagogical theory. Each of these theories is discussed in the subsections below.

Existential Phenomenology

The primary foundational theories of this study are phenomenological and pedagogical change theory. Phenomenological theory, as proposed by Patton (2002), explores the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for a particular individual or group of individuals. Existential-phenomenological-oriented inquiry focuses on what human beings experience through their senses (Patton, 2002). For humans to make meaning of something, they must experience it, and to experience it, they must sense it through conscious awareness. Phenomenology does not seek objective reality; the only reality for the phenomenologist is the subjective reality experienced by the individual (Patton, 2002; van Manen, 1990). The phenomenological approach, therefore, has two valuable implications. The first relates to the subject matter of the study, which refers to the human experience and how people make sense of their experience. The second implication is that in order for the researcher to understand an experience, he or she needs to experience the phenomena as much as possible. Phenomenological research assumes that there is an essence in lived and shared

experiences, and that the essences of different people are explored, dissected, and compared to determine the common or shared experience of the group (Patton, 2002).

Patton (2002) stated that the hermeneutics method examines “the conditions under which a human act took place or a product was produced that makes it possible to interpret the meanings” (p. 113). Hermeneutics is the study of the context in which meaning is created and interpreted. It is a study of interpretation, with a particular focus on understanding the context or original purpose (Patton, 2002). The theoretical framework to be adopted for this study is an experiential/phenomenological approach to qualitative research. Patton (2002) stated that a phenomenological inquiry asks, “What is the meaning, structure and essence of the lived experience for this phenomenon for this person or group of people?” (p. 104). This approach is intriguing, because humans tend to ignore details and focus on the bigger picture, missing a great opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena at hand.

To have a better understanding of an individual’s or group of individuals’ lived experiences, it is extremely important to examine the system constellations that surround them. Human beings exist within systems, and these systems profoundly influence their perceptions and notions of their experiences, particularly during the elementary school age years when children depend on the modeling and guidance of the adults who teach and care for them throughout their developmental processes. For a well-grounded examination of the information gathered from the teachers and parents participating in this qualitative inquiry, the theoretical approach will incorporate concepts from phenomenology hermeneutic, neurobiology, and critical pedagogical theories.

This study has been guided by the concept of phenomenology. Hence, the specific approach is grounded in van Manen's (1990) ideas of hermeneutic phenomenology and lifeworld existentials. Van Manen (1990) asserted that "there is a difference between comprehending the project of phenomenology intellectually and understanding it 'from the inside'" (p. 8). He suggested that the researcher needs to avoid the objective distance that is often expected of scholarly research, and instead, to make every effort to understand truly the essence of the participant's lived experience from the participant's worldview. Van Manen (1990) indicated that in hermeneutic phenomenology, "human science research is rigorous when it is 'strong' or 'hard' in a moral and spirited sense" (p. 18). What distinguishes a strong and rigorous human science is the courage and resolve to stand up for the uniqueness and significance of the notion to which it has dedicated itself.

Van Manen (1990) indicated that in the field of hermeneutic phenomenology, research is the process of examining the interrelationships between several activities as follows:

- The researcher must be seriously interested in the phenomenon under investigation.
- The researcher must investigate the experience as it is lived, rather than how he or she thinks it is lived.
- The researcher must be willing to reflect on essential themes that characterize the phenomenon.
- The researcher must be able to describe the phenomenon through the process of writing and re-writing.

- The researcher must remain focused on the phenomenon and must “maintain a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon” (van Manen, 1990, p. 30).

The researcher must be able to balance the context of the study by viewing it in terms of its parts, as well as the aggregate.

Van Manen (1990) provided methodology and suggested a hermeneutic phenomenology that can be explored using what he calls “lifeworld existentials” as guides for reflecting on the data collected in the study (p. 101). Lifeworld existentials are the fundamental themes common to all human beings, regardless of culture, social situation, history, or other factors (van Manen, 1990)). The lifeworld existentials include lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), and lived human’s relations (communality) (van Manen, 1990). A deeper examination of these constructs will be discussed in the following chapters.

The Bio-Ecological Model of Human Development

Urie Bronfenbrenner, a Russian American psychologist, is known for his extraordinary scholar work in research and policy on child development. According to Bronfenbrenner (2005, 1979), the power of phenomenology and of social context intrigued him profoundly. He has noted that from his involvement in field research in a cultural context and his work in other societies, he learned a great deal about the power of institutional policy to affect the welfare and development of human beings by shaping the environment of their lives. In his bioecological model, in this changing world, concepts concerning child development and the neurobiological sciences, among others, have dominated studies of the early years of a child’s life. The child’s relationships with

people and his or her environment have a profound influence on who the child will become. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), human beings' development and learning are the result of their interaction with various systems, along with the norms, rules, roles, and expectations of these systems.

The bio-ecological model of human development and systems will be used in this qualitative, phenomenologically oriented inquiry to examine the underpinning of human development and interacting systems. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model identified five systems that influence the psychosocial development of the individual. The first of these is the microsystem, which consists of the immediate environment. The second system is the mesosystem, which, according to Bronfenbrenner, comprises the connections between the microsystems. The third system is the exosystem, which consists of environmental situations that indirectly shape individual development. The fourth system is the macrosystem, which includes the larger, cultural context. The fifth system was created in 1986, and Bronfenbrenner named it the chronosystem, which incorporates a longitudinal approach to human system—that is, an assessment of the evolution of systems over time.

This study will incorporate Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986, 2005) bio-ecological model through an examination of the lived experience of parents and teachers from an urban elementary school in relation to the systems in which they live and work. Teachers and parents may be exposed to potential risk factors and may develop protective factors to mitigate these risks. As human beings, teachers and parents live in a variety of different microsystems that affect their personal development. An even greater number of systems influence parents and teachers who are working to educate elementary school age children. These microsystems will be examined in relation to Bronfenbrenner's

mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems, and chronosystems, as well as the four lifeworld existentials described by van Manen (1990). Using these theoretical approaches, this study will investigate the fundamental nature of being an elementary school parent and teacher, specifically in the context of how these individuals experience their relationships and work, and how these diverse systems influence their experiences.

Schools' Pedagogical Changes

Darder, Baltodano, & Torres (2009) pointed out that critical pedagogy is, in many ways, a valuable means of bringing about a range of different views and perspectives to strengthen the capacity of radical educators to engage critically with the effect of capitalism, gender, and racialized relations upon the lives of students from historically disenfranchised populations. These scholars quote John Dewey to emphasize their perception.

A society which makes provision for participation in its good of all members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is insofar democratic. Such a society must have a type of education, which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes. (John Dewey, 1916, p. 88)

In other words, Dewey (1966) held the belief that education must engage with and enlarge experience, that thinking and reflection are central to the act of teaching, and that students must freely interact with their environments in the practice of constructing knowledge.

The influence of the United States' socio-economic situation on education is an area of deep concern because it affects the achievement gap phenomenon. This gap is attributed to the perceived difference, based on the National Assessment of Education Progress (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003), in the education of students who are a minority in terms of race, ethnicity, and income when compared with students in white, middle-class America. Paul Barton (2004), a writer and consultant for Educational Testing Services, has asserted that the achievement gap mirrors inequalities in students' early lives and home conditions that a substantial body of research has linked to school achievement. Barton and Coley (2010) pointed out that after the gap narrowed during the 1970s and 1980s, it remained generally stable for a decade or so in both reading and math, but not for all age groups. The gap started to narrow again between 1999 and 2004; then again, between 2004 and 2008, there were no statistically significant changes in the gap. The 2001 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was implemented in attempt to narrow the achievement gap. The NCLB Act of 2001 required that test scores be disaggregated by racial/ethnic groups and that all subgroups reach "proficiency" by 2014. Some scholars have attributed the narrowing of the gap in the early 2000s to an early effect of the NCLB Act of 2001.

The achievement gap as an ongoing phenomenon has been discussed by many experts in education and related fields. Paulo Freire's (1970) discussion of the plight of the poor in education and his subsequent proposed critical pedagogical change theory (1993) will help to inform this study. This theoretical approach will help to contextualize the information gathered from parents and teachers participating in this study. This theory provides a framework for understanding the outcome of this dissertation. The study of

change management goes back to Kurt Lewin's (1935, 1948) work, which entailed an analysis of how group behavior affects the individual and the creation of a model to effect organizational change. Lewin used a series of investigations to demonstrate that true individualism is elicited by individual active group participation and discussion rather than by a simple order to change by a person in authority (Freire 1970; Lewin, 1935, 1948). Lewin used "force-field analysis," an organizational diagnosis for change; and his subsequent three-stage change process of "unfreezing" from the present level, moving to the next level of desired change, and "refreezing" to a new and higher level all resulted from his research. Lewin's work has been of paramount importance, first, in understanding how groups influence individuals; second, in looking at how groups resist change; and third, in offering recommendations for how groups can break through resistance to change.

Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Paulo Freire (1970, 1993) is a Brazilian philosopher and an expert educator who through the events of his life became a prominent and influential theorist of critical pedagogy nationally and internationally. In 1970, he authored the book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire (1970, 1993) described school pedagogical changes in terms of class, race, and gender. Freire's (2003) emphasis on critique, challenging oppressive regimes and social change, language, and power is very instructive. Freire (1993) believed in the transformation of society based on the real circumstances in the people and the society. Freire (1970) points out five important aspects to his pedagogical theoretical approach: dialogue, praxis, conscientization, lived experience, and use of metaphors drawn from Christian sources. One of Freire's main concerns is what he terms a "narrative"

education, describing the teacher talking and leading the students to memorize mechanically the narrated account. In the teacher-student relationship, the student represents an object to be filled. “The more submissively the object permits himself or herself to be filled, the better students they are in the eyes of the teacher. This is Freire’s “banking concept of education.” For Freire, the banking notion of education maintains and stimulates the contradiction of the following practices, mirroring an oppressive society:

- The teacher teaches, and the students are taught.
- The teacher knows everything, and the students know nothing.
- The teacher thinks, and the students are thought about.
- The teacher talks, and the students listen—meekly.
- The teacher disciplines, and the students are disciplined.
- The teacher chooses and enforces his or her choice, and the students comply.
- The teacher acts, and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher.
- The teacher chooses the program content, and the students adapt to it.
- The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which he/she sets in opposition to the freedom of the students.
- The teacher is the subject of the learning process, while the students are mere objects (Freire, 1970, p. 73).

In this constantly changing world, the educational system in particular is very important for understanding the change process and its effect on individuals in different parts of the system. In the end, the most important matter is intentionality in terms of developing the strategies to attain the desired change outcome. Therefore, Paulo Freire's (1970, 1993) theoretical approach will be used in this study to help contextualize the information gathered from parents and teachers participating in this study. This theory provides a framework for understanding the outcome of this dissertation.

The essence of Freire's action plan for liberation praxis to transform schooling includes the following:

- Respect for the “ways of being” of students.
- Control of necessary resources, autonomy, and partnership at the schoolhouse and locally.
- Permanent continuous teacher training based on “reflection on practice.”
- Changing school into creativity centers where teaching and learning is joyful, ending the practices of grade retention and push-out expulsion.
- An entirely new system of assessment appropriate to the children and their life experience.
- “A new pedagogy where students and their life experiences are the curriculum in constant interaction with teachers, who can help them question and explore who they are and what has gone before” (Freire, 2003, p. 11).

Freire (1970) indicated that the pedagogy of the oppressed as a humanist and libertarian pedagogy has two distinct stages. First, the oppressed unveil the world of

oppression, and through praxis, commit themselves to its transformation. In this stage, confrontation occurs through a change in the way the oppressed perceive the world of oppression. The pedagogy must deal with the problem of the oppressed consciousness and the oppressor consciousness—that is, the problem of men and women who oppress and men and women who suffer oppression. It must take into account their behavior, their view of the world, and their ethics. A particular problem is the duality of the oppressed: they are contradictory, divided beings, shaped by and existing in a concrete situation of oppression and violence. Second, the reality of oppression has already been transformed. This pedagogy ceases to belong to the oppressed and becomes the pedagogy of all people, who are permanently liberated in this stage through the expulsion of the myths created and developed in the old order, which, like specters, haunt the new structure emerging from the revolutionary transformation. In both stages it is always through action in depth that the culture of domination is altered through a change in the way the oppressed perceive the world of oppression. Change takes place by means of praxis with “reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed” (Freire, 1970, p. 126).

According to Pulliam and van Patten (2006), the history of modern school reform can be traced to the middle of the 20th century. In most cases, reform efforts resulted from concern for human rights and the need to address equality for every student. The aim of developing educational programs was to address the needs of the economically disadvantaged poor and culturally deprived students, students from minority groups, and students with language barriers. Included also were programs to address the needs of academically gifted students, students with special needs, and younger students’ need for daycare.

Research Questions

Regardless of the ongoing interest and suggestions for research, only a few studies, relatively speaking, have been undertaken to document and analyze the nature and experience of teachers' perceived role of parents' involvement and the manifestation of the teacher-parent relationship from the perspective of an urban elementary school undergoing pedagogical changes. However, the need for such work is particularly pressing in light of the ongoing struggles educators and administrators experience with children's lack of success in schooling. The potential of the teacher-parent relationship role cannot be realized without a better understanding of parents' role in the education of their children and of how the relationships between teachers and parents manifest themselves. Without first clarifying and acknowledging the source of their own relationship conflicts, teachers and parents cannot hope to achieve a genuine partnership in helping children to be successful academically.

Guiding Questions

The research question that has guided this study is as follows: How do teachers and parents perceive the role of the parents' involvement in supporting their children who attend a particular school that is undergoing child-centered pedagogical changes?

Subsidiary Research Questions

1. What are the lived experiences (lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived relations) of parents who have a role in their children's learning in elementary school?

2. What are the lived experiences (lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived relations) of teachers who have a role in their elementary school students' learning?
3. What potential risk factors are associated with parent-teacher engagement as they are involved in their children's or students' educational processes?
4. What potential protective factors are associated with parent-teacher engagement as they are involved in their children's and students' educational processes?
5. What are the roles of parents in children's learning in elementary school?

Protocol Interview Questions

Protocols were developed for parent interviews and for teacher interviews. These protocols appear in Chapter III.

Definition of Terms

Academic achievement: student performance on academic achievement tests.

Banking concept: the student is an empty vessel to be filled with knowledge, like a piggybank (Freire, 1970).

Child-centered pedagogical changes: the premise that students actively construct their own learning (Freire, 1970).

Critical pedagogy: Traditionally defined as educational theory and teaching/learning practices that are designed to raise learners' critical consciousness regarding oppressive social conditions (Freire 1970).

Elementary school: The first seven years of a child's formal education, including kindergarten and six grades.

Lived experience: The direct, first-hand experience of a phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2002).

Involved parent: A parent who makes sure that the child is fed, gets adequate sleep, and has good hygiene; sets basic rules about respect and safety; coaches and motivates his or her child in terms of interest in school; and, oversees the child's completion of school work and school attendance.

Pedagogy: defined as “the activity of teaching, parenting, educating, or generally living with children that requires constant practical acting in concrete situations and relations” (van Manen, p. 2).

PSSA assessments. Pennsylvania System of School Assessment [PSSA] of students in Grades 3-6, including math, reading, writing and science (PA Dept. of Education).

School pedagogical change: renewal activities to help the school to do better and/or more efficiently; improvement projects that include staff development and curriculum enhancement.

Reflection: teachers talk about their problems and difficulties in their teaching practice, generating a theory that informs practice (Freire 1993, p. 34).

Low-achieving school: defined as a public elementary or secondary school ranking in the bottom 15 percent of their designation as an elementary or secondary school based upon combined math and reading Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) scores (U. S. Department of Education).

Teacher Training: Continuous preparation through “reflection on practice.” Together with competent specialists and teachers who work with children's literacy. The dialogue will take place around the practice of teachers. (Freire, 1993, p. 34).

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 has served as an introduction, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, and limitations. Chapter 2 contains a review of related literature and current research regarding parental involvement in schools, with a major emphasis on exploring the profound impact of the role of the parents and teachers as change agents in the children's schooling while their school is undergoing pedagogical changes. The phenomenological approach is also explored as a framework for examining the lived experiences of parents and teachers, relying on the work of Freire (1970), Bronfenbrenner (1979/2005), and van Manen (1990). Chapter 3 contains the study design, rationale, methodology, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study. Chapter 4 presents the findings from the interviews, and Chapter 5 discusses these findings in light of the theoretical frameworks, drawing out themes and presenting suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Relationships are the “heart” of human interaction with the outside world; thus, nature of these relationships sets the stage for an individual’s success or disruption. This dissertation focuses on elementary school teachers’ and parents’ experiences when the children’s school is undergoing a child-centered pedagogical change in Western Pennsylvania. This study seeks to examine the essence of teachers’ perceptions concerning the parents’ role in helping students with their schooling. In spite of the abundance of theoretical literature, position statements, and empirical research, little research exists that examines the lived experience of either teachers or parents. I found no references that explore both teachers’ and parents’ experiences and how the engagement between them is manifested.

Relationships between Home and Public Education System

Maria Montessori (1870-1952) embraced the education of young children by establishing the first Casa Di Bambini (Children’s House) in 1907. Montessori devised a pedagogical program including a “delineation of a scale of sensitive periods of development,” which provides a focus for class work that is appropriate and uniquely stimulating and motivating to the child. Parental participation included basic and proper attention to healthcare. Despite criticism of the Montessori method, during the 1930s and 1940s, her programs were applied successfully, and they continue to be popular in early childhood education today (Montessori, 2007, 1965).

As referred to in Chapter 1, Bronfenbrenner’s (1974, 1979, 1986) works clearly explain the influences of the environment and its different ecological systems,

particularly the home and school, on child development. On the other hand, Freire's (1970, 1993) work emphasizes the paramount importance of the parents' role in the education of children. This is supported by many scholars, including Comer and Haynes (1991), Epstein (1982, 1987, 2005, 2011), Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995), Schneider (1993), and Zellman and Waterman (1998), who have done extensive research on parental involvement; and their findings overwhelmingly show the positive impact of PI on children's schooling. However, research shows that many schools, especially urban schools, often struggle with involving parents in the children's schooling, pointing to the difficult relationship between school and home.

The requirement mandated by NCLB is 100% proficiency by 2014. Although researchers have found that many schools are meeting the NCLB mandates, administrators from rural and urban schools are concerned about being able to meet them (Smeaton & Waters, 2008). Urban school districts, for example, experience tremendous difficulty in meeting these mandates. The three major challenges urban school educators and administrators identified include the subgroup of special education students, funding, and meeting proficiency. Urban school administrators also identified student diversity and transience as a major concern associated with curriculum alignment (Smeaton & Waters, 2008).

The provision of highly qualified teachers is one of Pennsylvania's accountability requirements. Effective school improvement depends on effective teacher preparation (Gordon, 2004). Scholars in education support the need for education programs to help teacher candidates link the moral purpose that influences them with the tools that will prepare teachers to engage in productive change (Fullan, 1993). To illuminate the

problems identified by the U. S. Department of Education (2002a) and the connection between students' academic success and home-school relationships, a large part of this literature review assesses articles involving public school teacher and parent relationships and the dynamic of interactions within the different related systems (e. g., home, school, and community). The review encompasses the concept of pedagogical change and the perceived role of the change agents.

Historical Overview of the Public Education System

Pennsylvania public schools have administered some form of state sponsored standardized tests since the early 1970s. Despite that, the public school system is facing challenges, mostly because of low academic achievement and the pressure to meet the academic yearly progress (AYP) standards in Pennsylvania. The implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) on the federal level (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) and the Chapter 4 regulations on the state level (PDE, 1998) have raised the stakes for educational assessments. In 1999, Title 22 of the Pennsylvania Code, which governs education in the state of Pennsylvania, underwent a significant revision through the declaration of three chapters and the inclusion of a new chapter in their place. The new chapter (Chapter 4) defined the purpose of public education, and among other things established statewide academic standards. It required the yearly assessment of student achievement by those standards (PDE, 1998). One of the main effects of this change was the establishment of the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) as Pennsylvania's education evaluation "arm."

There is broad agreement that districts, schools, and educators must be held accountable for improving student achievement. Significant disagreements exist,

however, as to how to measure and enforce this accountability. The NCLB has set benchmark goals to measure whether districts and schools are making adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward ensuring that all children are proficient in reading and math by the year 2014. Meeting standardized testing demands, or failing to do so, has become a source of great pride or great sorrow for local school districts across the United States as they struggle to find ways to increase their students' achievement.

Looking deeper into the demands from the Department of Education on the public school system, one piece of the puzzle requiring in-depth consideration is the integral role of parents in their children's education. A large body of research supports the concept that students with parents and families who are involved in their education tend to achieve higher test scores, pass their courses, graduate, move on to higher levels of education, and demonstrate better attendance, social skills, and behavior (Wherry, 2004). Therefore, there is a great need for school districts to provide parents with the opportunity to be active participants in meeting the stringent demands of the formal curriculum. In this age of accountability, the involvement of a parent in a child's education is vitally important to the success of that student. It is important because of the accountability that has been imposed upon schools by the NCLB and Chapter 4 (Drummond & Stipek, 2004).

According to Sunderman, Kim, & Orfield (2005), the federal government, through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), provides compensatory educational services for economically disadvantaged school districts. Title I of ESEA, established in 1965, is the primary means for improving educational opportunities to low-income students. Congress reauthorizes it periodically. As the latest reauthorization of

ESEA, NCLB differs from previous ESEAs by requiring all schools and districts to implement a single statewide accountability system for ensuring equal educational outcomes (NCLB, 2002). Under NCLB, performance on state reading and mathematics tests determines whether schools make AYP. Schools failing to meet these achievement goals are subject to an escalating series of severe sanctions over time, ranging from mandatory school choice options and supplemental services to school reconstitution and restructuring. For the first time in the history of Title I, the federal government is now dictating the pace of progress required of all schools, regardless of which students they serve and what resources they have, and requiring prescriptive sanctions for each low-performing school that fails to improve scores.

One of the main beliefs of NCLB is that academic competition will produce better educational opportunities for disadvantaged students and will improve the performance of low-performance schools. This belief is embodied in the requirement that low-performing schools offer their students the option to transfer to another school or provide them with supplemental educational services (tutoring). During recent years, the public schools in United States have experienced increased organizational pressure and frustration as they strive to find ways to improve their students' academic achievement. This pressure has come in the form of accountability based on student performance on high stakes standardized assessment and on attendance data.

Many scholars agree that the most important factor for improving student achievement is to develop and “promote shared responsibility between families and educators” (Christenson, Godber, & Anderson, 2005). The most valuable part of this connection is to develop a “culture of success that enhances learning experience and

competencies across home and school, and underscores that partnership means shared goals, contributions, and accountability” (Christenson, Godber, & Anderson, 2005). Such a positive dynamic between the home and the school can lead to increased student achievement. By supporting parents in taking a proactive stance, schools can potentially diminish the dissonance, which is associated with reactively addressing problems after they have developed. Van Manen (1977) has asserted that “home background and social milieu have been shown to be the most significant determinants of student achievement” (p. 210).

Urban Elementary Schools

Research shows that urban school districts are experiencing tremendous difficulty in meeting the NCLB mandates. The three major challenges identified by urban school educators and administrators are the subgroup of special education students, funding, and meeting proficiency standards. Urban school administrators identified student diversity and transience as major concerns associated with curriculum alignment. Also, they identified a higher incidence of seeking community support and adjusting school calendars than in rural schools.

Noguera (2001) stated, “Urban schools in the U.S. are the backwater of public education” (p. 196). These schools’ continuing failure blends in easily with the panorama of pathologies afflicting the inner city and its residents. The nature of the relationships between the members of the different ecological systems (school, home, community, etc.) is a key factor that will determine the form of social capital to be created. Such relationships are fearful and distrustful, and they still prevail (Noguera, 2001). These weak relationships are sources of negative social capital. On the other hand, connections

based on respect and shared senses of responsibility are strong relationships that will generate a positive form of social capital.

Greenberg and Schneider (1994) point out the existence of weak intracommunity ties in poor urban areas because of the physical and economic deterioration of the community, the high levels of distrust among residents, and a lack of formal and informal civic associations. Efforts to enhance the control of parents over the schools that serve them can undermine the development of physical and economic aspects of social capital in this community. Coleman (1988) asserted that although congruity in values leads to a reinforcement of social norms that promote regular school attendance, conformity to school rules, and concern for academic achievement, public schools tend to have relatively low social closure with the families they serve; consequently, children often get lost in the discontinuity between the values and norms promoted at school and those supported by families (as cited in Noguera, 2001, p. 203). Noguera, building on Coleman's point, has argued that public schools can more effectively serve the needs of the children who attend them when efforts aimed at producing greater closure are pursued.

According to Noguera (2001), the transformation of the culture of the organization will happen when parents feel respected and provided with support that enables them to channel their interest for the benefit of their children's schools. Parents' knowledge of their children's lives outside of schools, which educators and administrators or school staff typically do not have (Ladson-Billings, 1994, as cited in Noguera, 2001), is a very important factor. Educators' awareness in this regard can facilitate the process of developing effective pedagogical strategies. For Noguera, the

familiarity between school and parents can also begin to generate social closure and transform urban schools from alien and hostile organizations into genuine community assets. Noguera said that urban schools serving large numbers of poor children will take a considerable amount of time to transform into well-functioning organizations that provide high-quality education to students. The changes in these schools is a slow process owing to the existence of systemic barriers, including low-income areas, joblessness, environmental degradation, crime, and lack of access to social services, which will not disappear just because parents exercise leadership at local schools. These barriers will continue to have an impact on children, families, and schools (Noguera, 2001).

Student Academic Performance

At the beginning of the 20th century, the gap in educational attainment started to narrow (Barton & Coley, 2010), but progress generally halted for those born around the mid-1960s, ironically at a time when landmark legislative victories heralded an end of racial discrimination. Had those things that were helping to close the gap stopped, or had they been overshadowed by new adversities that were not remedied by gaining equality before the law (Barton & Coley, 2010; Nettles, 2010)?

The nation's attention has been — and remains—riveted on the persistent Black-White gap in the achievement of our elementary and secondary school students. Each year when the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) releases “the nation's report card,” the front-page news focuses on whether scores are rising or falling and whether the achievement gap is changing. (Barton & Coley, 2010, p. 3)

Barton and Coley (2010) point to the long history of the nation's efforts to meet the achievement gap. In 1954, these expectations increased with the *Brown v. Board of Education* desegregation decision and in 1965 with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which focused on the inequality of school resources. Nevertheless, in 1964, the Civil Rights Act spiked optimism for progress in education and in society at large. Later, in 2001 the NCLB Act signed into law by President George Bush in 2002, was intended to "disaggregate" the average achievement scores of state accountability programs to expose the inequalities that had to be addressed. Barton and Coley (2010) asserted that most of the progress in closing the achievement gap in reading and mathematics occurred during the 1970s and 1980s, after which the overall progress in closing the gaps has slowed. With the exception of 2008, in the achievement gap in reading for 9-year-olds, the size of the gaps seen in the late 1980s has never been smaller.

This urban elementary school, grade 3 through 6, made the Achievement Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2011-2012. In this school, with a 99% participation rate from all students, 8% scored below basic, 15% basic, 46% proficient, and 31% advanced. Among Black students, 79% scored at the proficient level or above, and 78% percent of White student were proficient and above. The overall state score was 73%, with Black students at 47% and White students at 80%. In 2010-2011 this elementary school had not made AYP; participation was 100% and the overall scores were as follows: 20% were below basic, 20% basic, 39% proficient, and 20% advanced. Among Black students, 57% scored proficient and above, whereas 76% of White students scored proficient and above. The overall state score was 76%, with Black students averaging 54% and White students 82% (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012). Barton and Coley (2010) asserted

that after James Coleman et al.'s famous mid-1960s report, *Equality of Education Opportunity*, researchers argued that conditions in families influence the student achievement. These have generated questions about how much family factors and other before-school and out-of-school factors affect student achievement as compared with school quality.

Problems Associated with Children's Risk

According to Bronfenbrenner (2005), the chaos in the lives of children and their families is present in many of the principal settings in which we live, including our homes, healthcare systems, childcare arrangements, peer groups, schools, neighborhoods, workplaces, and means of transportation and communication (p. 195). He identified two main trends: first, the growing chaos in the lives of children, youth, and families and, second, a progressive decline in the competence and character of successive generations as they move into the 21st century. Bronfenbrenner pointed out a few prominent developmental trends:

- Increasing cynicism and disillusionment in American adolescents and youth as perceived from their loss of faith in others
- Increased self-centeredness and disregard for the needs of others
- High number of youth spending their formative years in prison
- High rates of teenage births
- Increase of failing standardized measures of school achievement for almost all students. (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 186)

Bronfenbrenner (2005) argued “for greater involvement of adults in the life of children and, conversely, for greater involvement of children in the problems and tasks of society” (p. 207).

Poverty and its Effect on People

Moore et al. (2009) report that in 2007, in the United States, the number of children living in families with incomes below the poverty line increased from 16.2% in 2000 to 18.0% in 2007. Child poverty merits attention because a substantial body of research links poverty with lower levels of child well-being. For a variety of reasons, when compared with children from more affluent families, poor children are more likely to have low academic achievement, to drop out of school, and to have health, behavioral, and emotional problems. These linkages are particularly strong for children whose families experience deep poverty, who are poor during early childhood, and who are trapped in poverty for a long time.

Payne (2005) defines *generational poverty* as a family’s having been in poverty for at least two generations; however, the patterns previously described begin to surface much sooner than two generations if the family lives with others who have a background of generational poverty. *Situational poverty* is defined as a lack of resources because of a particular event (i.e., a death, chronic illness, divorce, etc.). Generational poverty has its own culture, hidden rules, and belief systems. A key indicator of whether the poverty is generational or situational is the prevailing attitude. Often the attitude in generational poverty is that society owes one a living, whereas in situational poverty, the attitude is often proud, accompanied by a refusal to accept charity. Individuals in situational poverty often bring more resources with them to the situation than those in generational poverty.

What, then, makes those trapped in generational poverty so different from the middle class? Why is school such an unsatisfactory experience for many poverty-stricken students? Several of these differences were mentioned in Payne's (2005) chapter on hidden rules. Payne's research summed up family support in three words: insistence, expectations, and support (p. 107). The supports these students need are cognitive strategies, appropriate relationships, coping strategies, goal-setting opportunities, and appropriate instruction in both content and discipline. Payne (1998) asserted, "The true discrimination that comes out of poverty is the lack of cognitive strategies" (p. 139). This lack is a comprehensive handicap for such individuals. The key to achievement for students with a background of poverty is in their creation of relationships. Thus, the most significant motivator for these students is to create a relationship with them (Noguera & Wing, 2006; Payne, 2005; Schneider & Coleman, 1993).

The Virginia State Department of Education (1993) identified the following four responses as being effective in promoting learning for at-risk students:

1. Developmental preschool programs
2. Supplemental reading programs
3. Reducing class size
4. School wide projects in prevention and support.

These four responses could allow for relationships, support, insistence, and development of cognitive strategies. A study of low-performance schools (in which some children achieve) looked at the external resources that students bring to school (Anderson, Hollinger, & Conaty, 1993). What seems to be more important than parents' involvement, such as their coming to the school, is whether parents provide assistance,

expectations, and support at home. Smith, A. G. and Liebenberg (2003) did a qualitative study using parents from an area of extreme poverty in Cape Town. The purpose of the study was to understand the realities and dynamics facing parents when they attempt to be involved in their child's schooling. A particular finding was that schools and teachers were the ones preventing parents from being actively involved in their children's schooling.

Stern (1987) said that educators can fight family poverty and inequality by helping to shape public perceptions of social and cultural problems. The author asserted that "[w]hile the increased number of female-headed families is a product of complex social and cultural changes, the reason for their increased poverty is quite simple: government neglect" (p. 83).

Parent as Change Agent

Reisinger, Ora, and Frangia (1976) said that "one of the potential benefits of parents as change agents for their children is the possibility that parents continue change efforts over time, without cost to themselves or society" (p. 108). According to these scholars, "evidence, attitudes, and opinions suggest the feasibility of utilizing parents as change agents to partially fill the increasing gap between supply and demand for children's mental health service delivery" (p. 103). Another important issue is whether parents can generalize clinic-taught techniques across environments and classes of behavior. It was not until the development of filial therapy that parents were given an active role in the treatment of their children. The therapy approach, designed for emotionally disturbed children under 10 years of age, trains groups of parents to conduct standardized play sessions with their children (Fidler, Guerney, Andronico, & Guerney,

1969; Guerney, 1964; Guerney, Guerney & Andronico, 1966, all three references as cited in Reisinger & Ora, 1976, p. 114). The parents are relied upon to effect changes in their child and in themselves at home prior to the home sessions. In-clinic parent training is provided for 6 to 8 weeks.

According to Fidler et al. (1969, as cited in Reisinger et al., 1976), filial therapy does not follow the folklore of psychiatry, which has pictured parents as competitors with largely negative influences upon their children. While parent cooperation, motivation, and rapport with the therapist are considered necessary conditions for attempting the change agent role, they are not sufficient. Results indicated that mothers were able to learn and apply filial techniques, and that the children's behavior changed in response to such procedures. The filial approach has been applied in schools (Andronico & Guerney, 1967), and also in a Headstart program (Andronico & Guerney, 1969) where trained mothers were able to teach other mothers to use the procedures. Again, the perception of the parents' competence and prospective role assignment varies substantially across the theoretical orientations of the professionals. In current published reports, the role of the parent is mainly predictable from the treatment model under examination, and the reported outcome of parental involvement can also, to a great extent, be predicted from the model. Favorable results in using parent change agents have been usual, according to behavioral and client-centered therapist reports (Reisinger et al., 1976).

The parents' influence on their children's learning and academic achievement does not end after infancy but continues throughout adolescence. Several researchers (Epstein & Hollifield, 1996; Lareau, 2000) have shown that the educational and socioeconomic background of parents plays a decisive role in the formation of student

attitudes and habits toward school. Philosopher John Dewey (1995) argued with respect to the role of parents, “What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must be what the community wants for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy” (p. 7). Parent involvement has been hailed as vital to promoting academic success, especially for poor and minority students (Epstein & Hollifield, 1996; Lareau, 1989).

Christensen, Schneider, and Butler (2011) described the predictable and unpredictable scheduling demands that school-age children place on working couples and single working parents. These scholars assessed the potential capacity of schools to help meet the needs of working families through changes in school schedules and after-school programs. These scholars arrived at the conclusion that the flexibility parents need to balance family/work responsibilities probably cannot be found in the school setting. Among other things, these scholars argued that workplaces are better able than schools to offer the flexibility that working parents need to attend to basic needs of their children, as well as to engage in activities that enhance their children’s academic performance and emotional and social well-being.

Relationships/Attachment/Empathy/Self-Efficacy

Relationships, as previously observed, are the “heart” of human interaction with the outside world. The nature of children’s relationships, especially those with parents—who are the most significant people in a child’s life—sets the stage for success or disruption. Many experts in child psychiatry and in child development and related fields (e.g., Bowlby 1982; Stern, 1985; Winnicott 1965, 1964) have intensively studied attachments, parent-child relationships, and the profound impact of the genetic and

environmental conditions on a child's upbringing. Siegel and Hartzell (2003) asserted that from the very first minute of life, a child depends upon its mother or other loving, sensitive caregiver for its survival. The relationship between the mother or other adult caregiver and the infant experience is an intimate connection that gives the baby a sense of security. John Bowlby (1988), the pioneer of the attachment theory, called it a "secure base." A secure, attached child has been found to have positive development socially, emotionally, and cognitively (Bowlby, 1988, as cited in Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). These experts mentioned research findings that have pointed to the importance of the parent and child relationship in shaping children's interactions with other children. They emphasized the children's sense of security about exploring the world, their resilience to stress, their ability to balance their emotions, their capacity to construct a lucid story that makes sense of their lives, and the ability to create meaningful interpersonal relationships as they grow older. This process provides a foundation for how a child comes to approach the world. The development of an early healthy attachment provides a secure base from which children can learn about themselves and others (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003).

Siegel and Hartzell's (2003) attachment research findings show that individuals' early years create their destiny. However, research findings also indicate that parent-child relationships can change and that as they do, the child's attachment changes. Such findings provide hope that it is never too late to create positive changes in a child's life. Therefore, a child's nurturing relationship with an adult, other than a parent with whom the child feels understood and safe, becomes a valuable source of resilience, a seed in the child's mind that can be developed later on as the child grows. Relationships with relatives, teachers, childcare providers, and counselors can provide an important source

of connection for the growing child. These relationships do not replace a secure attachment with a primary caregiver, but they are a source of strength for the child's developing mind (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003).

Daniel Stern (1985) asserts that the representational world of the parents is the first element of the clinical situation to be examined. Parents' representations have played a key role in the history of parent/infant psychotherapies influenced by psychodynamic considerations. The existing mental world plays an important role in determining the nature of the parents' relationship with the baby. This representational world includes not only the parents' experiences of current interactions with the baby but also their fantasies, hopes, fears, dreams, memories of their own childhoods, models of parenting, and prophecies for the infant's future. Stern describes these representations in terms of *schemas-of-being-with*. The interactive experience can be a real, lived experience, or it can be a virtual, imagined (fantasized) interactive experience.

Klein (1988) has noted that children's perceptions of their life in school provide a means to illuminate a part of the complex process of becoming a student. Klein suggests that young children's interactions with adults have a profound impact on a wide range of developmental processes. She focuses on young children's perceptions of teachers and mothers, and includes a comparison of the perceptions of preschool and kindergarten children with respect to the roles of these significant adults. The authors discuss the way in which children's perceptions are socially constructed based on their experiences within the school setting.

Parent School Involvement

The origin of parental involvement, as it is perceived currently, is an outgrowth of the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and Johann Pestalozzi (1746-1827). According to Pestalozzi, a mother is the “chief teacher” of a child. The mother nourishes the mind and the body of her child (Pestalozzi, 1915, p. xviii). “If no one has taught you to know the world as I am forced to learn it, then come, we will learn it together, as you ought, and I must” (Pestalozzi, 1915, p. 190). In his method Pestalozzi emphasizes the power of the mother/child relationship, pointing out that mothers are teachers by nature and that “even the lowest material of ordinarily school-instruction might be founded upon the results of companionable motherly instruction” (Pestalozzi, 1915, p. 60). Zellman and Aterman (1998) studied 193 children in a San Diego elementary school, along with their mothers, in an attempt to understand the impact of parents’ school involvement on children’s educational outcomes. Their findings indicate that parent school involvement appears to be a manifestation of parental enthusiasm and positive parenting style.

Bronfenbrenner (1986) conducted a review to collate and examine critically the theoretically convergent, but widely dispersed body of research on the influence of external environments on the functioning of families as contexts of human development. Investigations falling within this expanding domain include the following:

- Studies of the interaction of genetics and environment in family processes
- Transitions and linkages between the family and other major settings influencing development, such as hospitals, day care, peer groups, school, social networks, the world of work (for both parents and children), neighborhoods, and communities

- Public policies affecting families and children.

A second major focus is on the patterning of environmental events and transitions over the life course as these affect and are affected by intrafamilial processes. Special emphasis was given to critical research gaps in knowledge and priorities for future investigation. The aim of Bronfenbrenner's article was to document and delineate promising lines of research on external influences that affect the capacity of families to foster the healthy development of their children, and to find answers to the question of how intrafamilial processes are affected by extrafamilial conditions. Swick and Williams (2006) have presented the key elements of Bronfenbrenner's perspective and have applied it to strategies for helping families under stress.

Comer and Haynes (1991) described the change process and the way in which a parent program in one school led to meaningful and useful parental involvement, which became an enduring and fully integrated program in the schools, not just an adjunct project. The program contained three mechanisms, three operations, and three guidelines. The key program element was a governance mechanism that represented all the adult stakeholders in the school: parents, teachers, administrators, professional support staff, and nonprofessional support staff.

Davis-Kean and Eccles (2005) asserted that schools and families are partners in the healthy academic, social, and emotional development of the child. Even though during early education, children's lives revolve around school and the home, and frequent communication and interaction should be common to coordinate and manage the healthy development of a child, research shows a lack in both the frequency and quality of this type of communication (Epstein, 1990; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey &

Sandler, 1997). Henderson and Mapp (2002) showed that family behaviors at home and parental involvement with the children's schooling are strongly associated with school learning. Although comprehensive efforts to engage parents at various points and different ways is productive (Gordon et al., 1979; Swap, 1993) in many schools, engaging parents is peripheral to the school's mission of educating children; therefore, personnel and budgets assigned to parental engagement are scarce, and schools are not typically held accountable to the state for their outreach to parents (Epstein, 2011).

Joyce L. Epstein (2011) is the director of the Center on School, Family and Community Partnership, the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS), as well as principal research scientist and research professor of sociology at Johns Hopkins University. During 1980-1981, Epstein researched 3,700 teachers, parents, students, and administrators in 600 elementary schools in Maryland. The scholars involved in this project learned about practices of partnership that were used by teachers and guided by principals and district leaders, which were aligned with the state and district policies, desired by families, and responsive to students. They examined the following:

- How often and in what ways teachers and their schools involved parents
- The effect of parents' social class and marital status on their school involvement
- How elementary school students understood and reacted to connections between their families and teachers
- The results of partnerships on the attitudes and practices of teachers, the actions and behaviors of parents, and the attitudes and achievement of students.

The early studies provided systematic, quantitative analyses of the nature and extent of family involvement in the elementary grades. The data raised many questions about existing theories of effective school organization and effective families and communities, and led to the development of the theory of overlapping spheres of influence. In 1987, Epstein and others began field studies with educators, families, and students in urban elementary and middle schools. This research increased understanding of how involvement changes across the grades, by teachers of different subjects, for parents from various racial and cultural groups, and in schools that are guided into systematically organizing their programs of partnership with families and communities. The early studies and the research that continues today aim to improve knowledge about whether and how family, school, and community connections can improve schools' organization and thus assist student learning and development across the grades, from preschool through high school. Epstein's (2011) findings, from their teachers' surveys show that teachers' ideas and behaviors are more positive if they believe that their school as a whole is working to involve families. Some teachers communicate effectively with families regardless of the parents' race, formal education, neighborhood, or school context. These teachers' successful efforts suggest that other teachers could do the same, if they were helped to use similar strategies for developing partnerships, and particularly if they were supported by the administrators and other teachers in their school.

Data from the parents' survey help to explain why earlier ideas about parental involvement were limited by their inattention as to whether schools and teachers were using practices to involve all parents. Epstein (2011) asserted that families *want* to be involved. Indeed, in all of the surveys conducted since 1980, nearly all parents report that

they try to remain involved at home in encouraging and aiding their children's schooling, but they also say that they need more and better information in order to know what to do to help their children each year. Data from students show that students want their families to be knowledgeable partners with their schools in their education and available as helpful sources of information and assistance at home. Findings from the students' surveys show an important subject-specific connection. Involvement by parents in a particular subject at home leads to gains in student achievement in that subject. Epstein (2011) wanted to learn whether teachers' efforts to involve families affected their students' perceptions of the congruency between home and school, and whether students' homework habits were modified by teachers' practices to involve families. They also wanted to see if reports from teachers, principals, and students about parental involvement produced similar results on these measures. The results of these analyses influenced a new line of research and development, which has helped teachers to design new forms of interactive homework and thus involve families in various school subjects, which, in turn, has boosted student achievement.

Epstein (2011) pointed out that one of the most consistent results in the various surveys that these scholars and other researchers have conducted in the United States and other countries is that teachers have very different views of parents than parents have of themselves. Most teachers do not know parents' hopes and dreams for their children or their questions about parenting children at different ages and grade levels, nor do they understand what parents presently do at home to help their children. Similarly, neither parents nor teachers fully understand what students think about school, family, and

community partnerships. Indeed, most adults believe that students want families to avoid or minimize family involvement in their education.

Challenges to Parental School Involvement

Eccles and Harold (1993) introduced a model to study a wide range of factors across multiple contexts, including family, school, and community, that were likely to influence parental involvement. In this model, these scholars explained how distal influences, such as neighborhood and school characteristics, and the more proximal characteristics of teacher and parental beliefs influence whether or not parents become involved in the schools and have subsequent effects on child outcomes. Reviews of findings on parent involvement have supported the existence of these various influences and challenges to better interactions and communication between parents and the schools (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, as cited in Eccles & Harold, 1993). The challenges faced by parent/family uniqueness are found under the socioeconomic status and the mental health of the parent. In this category, the factor predictors of involvement include parent education and workplace. Parents with higher education levels are more involved, but parents in the workplace have limited time for involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997, as cited in Davis-Kean & Eccles, 2005). Other parent/family characteristics presenting barriers to parent involvement include parents' social and psychological resources, parents' perceptions of their children, parents' beliefs about their role in their children's education, parents' attitudes toward school, parents' ethnic identity and socialization practices, and parents' prior involvement in their children's education. In addition, parents with a language barrier face tremendous difficulty with parental involvement.

The influence of community uniqueness on families' involvement in school include parents' parenting style, as parents develop parenting behaviors that are consistent with the demands of their environments. In high-risk neighborhoods, parents' major concern is protecting their children from the negative influences and consequences of that environment regardless of other expectations. An interaction also exists between parent characteristics and the communities. Parents living in an at-risk community tend to have lower education, lower-status jobs, low social support, lower emotional intelligence or social skills, and lower financial resources.

The children's characteristics are mainly examined in children entering the adolescence years. The children's transition to a new environment presents risks surrounding self-esteem and motivation (Eccles et al., 1993). At this developmental stage, the parents' perception is that their children hardly need their involvement any longer. The parents also tend to feel less adequate at helping or participating with adolescence because the schoolwork becomes more complicated over the school years. Nevertheless, parent involvement is not only necessary as adolescents enter a transition that can lead to either a healthy or risky developmental trajectory (Eccles & Harold, 1993) but is also actually what many adolescents want.

In terms of school and teacher characteristics and practices, these scholars found two major barriers: first, the organization and physical structure of the school, lack of easy accessibility to classrooms, and inability to locate personnel to assist them with issues and, second, the school personnel's beliefs and attitudes regarding parent involvement across all grades. Teachers' attitudes and beliefs are predictors of how

accommodating a classroom is to the parent and of whether or not a parent feels welcome and invited to participate in the classroom or school (Eccles & Harold, 1993).

Teachers' Perceptions of Parents' Role in Parental School Involvement

Dunlap and Alva (1999) did an exploratory study to examine teachers' attitudes and beliefs about parent-school relationships in general and the parental involvement that developed over time at the *Instituto Familiar*. The data gathered were from 12 teachers at the school (representing about one-fourth of the teaching staff). Teachers were asked to answer six questions that addressed issues of parents' and teachers' expectations, home-school partnerships, and the teachers' perception of the benefits of parental involvement at the *Instituto Familiar*. Dunlap and Alva's exploratory study of teachers' perceptions of parental involvement indicates that teachers do not possess a single commonly held view of parents and parental involvement, even at the same school site. These scholars concluded that the teachers' responses illustrate the attitudes, understanding and reasoning that are critical for teachers to develop if they are to be successful at fostering and promoting parent involvement. Teachers' expanded responses were clustered into two positions: 1) teachers with a strong and consistent stance (educentric) and 2) teachers who expressed a broader understanding of parent involvement as embedded in a family and community context. The researchers found these positions to be consistent with Freire's (1970) views of transformative education, which point out the need for teachers to develop a critical social consciousness (Dunlap & Alva, 1999).

Empathic Understanding in Parent-School Involvement

Gordon, M. (2009) has defined empathy as a unique moral virtue that has profound meaning in the shaping of an individual. There has been a significant clinical

and pedagogical focus, beginning with Headstart through the elementary school setting, to help children develop empathy skills. Children's explorations as they grow up are based on relationships with their surroundings, and inevitably, this interaction involves conflict and challenges. It is in these relationships that the roots of empathy can be found (Gordon, 2009). This empathy eventually can blossom with children's interactions with their teachers and peers in the school community. Many scientific investigations have been conducted and books have been written about this phenomenon, and it often is observed that the way children learn to interact with and respond to others has a profound impact on their behavior and academic performance. Empathic understanding can profoundly affect the interaction with parents. Carl R. Rogers (1980) qualitatively defined empathic understanding as an active process of knowing the phenomenon of continuity and changing the awareness of another person. It is listening to parents' stories and translating their words and signs into an experienced meaning that matches the aspects of their awareness that are most valuable to them at the time. As expressed by Rogers, "It is an experiencing of the consciousness 'behind' another's outward communication, but with continuous awareness that this consciousness is originating and proceeding in the other" (p. 144).

Cooper (2004) examined the role of empathy in teacher-pupil relationships and its relevance to moral modeling. Data were collected through interviews and classroom observations and grounded methodology theory used for the analysis. The findings showed that empathic teachers do see themselves as moral models and work exhaustively to treat pupils as individuals, valuing them and, moreover, expecting them to value others. The findings also revealed how the system and the constraints under which

teachers work subvert their natural empathic concern. The role of empathy was found to be a varied and rich phenomenon, which shows itself to different degrees and extends to different contexts. Empathy not only has a powerful effect on relationships and behavior but it is also fundamental to high quality learning. The study showed that context is very important in affecting the degree of empathy, as demonstrated by the teachers. Cooper (2004) concluded that neuroscience has reaffirmed the significance of the affective in interaction and learning, as previously advocated by psychologists. Intensive positive interaction generates engagement, rapid processing, and emotional attachment. The findings in this study confirm the significance of affective issues in learning and the role of empathy in the facilitation of personal, social, moral and academic development. Emerging most rapidly in one-to-one interactions, empathy develops over time and is strongly influenced by context. As relationships develop, empathy moves from a fundamental to a profound level. Profound empathy involves the development of a complex mental model of the other, which is closely associated with one's mental model of oneself. Profound empathy generates shared positive emotions, which develop and enrich the individual sense of self. Profound empathy was most evident in lessons with fewer pupils where everyone was engaged in positive, more equal, and mutually respectful and responsive relationships.

The family home structure and character of the child's home environment is in many ways likely to be the most critical area of parent involvement. The parent/child relationship within the home is likely to include a significant historical and cumulative component. Involvement at home is the least likely to change, since it is the least subject to external constraints. It is also important because it best reflects the nature of the

parents' values in education, the ways the educational process is incorporated into the interactions of family members, and how parents structure the child's environment to be conducive to learning. She-Ahn Lee (1993) stated that within the family, rising rates of divorce and separation and increasing numbers of out-of-wedlock births are leading social researchers to regard single parent families as no longer "atypical" (Epstein, 1990; Garfinkel & McLanahan, 1986). About 50% of all children born in the 1980s will live with only one parent for at least 3 years before reaching age 18 (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Sweet & Bumpass, 1987). The rise in the number of single-parent families has created yet another phenomenon. It is now quite common for a child to experience diverse family situations. At one point the mother might marry, and then the child would be living in a melded family. It has been found that many formerly married mothers remarry and that, among children whose mothers remarry, about one-half experience a second family disruption before age 16 (Garfinkel & McLanahan, 1986; Sweet & Bumpass, 1987). Studies that highlight the multiple family disruptions experienced by children provide at least two insights into the analysis of family structure. First, as Bumpass (1984) contends, figures obtained from any cross-sectional data grossly underestimate the number of children spending some portions of their lives in single-parent families, particularly households headed by single mothers. This underestimation occurs because remarriages of mothers lead to a much smaller number of children living in single-parent families at any given point in time than the number who live in single-parent families sometime during their childhood. In addition, many children found in single-parent families at one time will already have experienced, or will later experience, living in other types of families—e.g., stepparent families.

Parents' Sense of Self-efficacy

Social learning theorists perceive self-efficacy as a sense of confidence regarding the performance of specific tasks. Alberto Bandura (1986) defined self-efficacy as individuals' judgments of their abilities to organize and carry out a course of action required to attain designated types of performances. Bandura (1977) said that several studies have been completed which demonstrate that parents who believe they can affect their children's development are more proactive and successful in cultivating their children's competencies than parents who doubt that they can do much to influence their children's development (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001; Coleman & Karraker, 1997; Elder, 1995). Building on this concept, parents who provide a warm, responsive, and supportive home environment; who encourage exploration and stimulate curiosity; and who provide play and learning materials accelerate their children's intellectual development (Collins, 1982). Bandura (1997) also stated that parents who arrange for varied mastery experiences develop more efficacious youngsters than do parents who arrange fewer opportunities. In summary, when parents feel a high sense of self-efficacy concerning their ability to help their children learn, they supply more opportunities for their children, resulting in children with higher senses of self-efficacy themselves. Therefore, parents' lack of confidence in their ability to help their children learn to have high self-efficacy is a cause for alarm for these parents and youngsters alike. Parental aspirations are positively linked to all forms of children's' perceived self-efficacy—academic, social, and self-regulatory. “The aspirations held for their children also have a strong impact on their children's academic aspirations and level of academic achievement” (Bandura et al., 2001). Bandura also asserted that individuals develop

“general anticipation” regarding cause and effect, based upon their past experience. Furthermore, he suggested that individuals develop particular beliefs about their ability to cope with specific tasks. If such theories are applied to the study of parents’ beliefs regarding their ability to help their children learn, it would be logical to predict that parents with low self-efficacy would be likely to put forth little effort to work with their children, and parents with high self-efficacy would be likely to put forth great effort to work with their children (Bandura, 1982/1997). Bandura noted that not all parents feel a low degree of self-efficacy towards their ability to work successfully with their children. He believed that socio-economic status and parental level of education correlate with the level of parents efficacy in promoting their children’s academic development. Social learning theory suggests that parents with strong self-efficacy for helping the child succeed are likely to persist in the face of challenges and work through difficulties to successful outcomes. Low self-efficacy, on the other hand, may be associated with low persistence or simply quitting if it appears that involvement is not making any difference. A personal sense of efficacy for helping the child succeed in school is important to positive family-school relationships. Self-efficacy and role construction are also linked. Parent with high self-efficacy who believe their actions will really help their children learn are likely to receive support from this belief for more active role construction. Parents with low self-efficacy who may try but who perceive little benefit from their attempts are likely to adopt a more passive role construction. In sum, a sense of efficacy for helping the child succeed in school is an important contributor of parents’ involvement decisions.

Parenting Style

John Gottman (1997) stated that parenting is an art rooted in individuals' deepest feelings of love and empathy for their children. Parenting requires emotional awareness and a specific set of listening and problem-solving behaviors. Parenting comes naturally to some parents; other parents must overcome certain barriers, which may be the result of the way emotions were handled in the homes in which they grew up, or they may merely lack parenting skills. Whatever the source, these barriers can keep parents from being the kind of strong supportive mothers and fathers they want to be. Gottman (1997) identified four parenting styles:

1. The dismissing parent. This parenting style precipitates a feeling of being wrong, inappropriate, and not valid. Children may learn that there is something inherently wrong with them because of the way they feel. The children may also experience difficulty regulating their own emotions.
2. The disapproving parent. This parenting style is similar to the previous in its effect on children.
3. The laissez-faire parent. Children brought up with this parenting style do not learn to regulate their emotions. These children will experience trouble concentrating, forming friendships, and getting along with other children.
4. The emotion coach parenting style. This is the most appropriate and desirable parenting style. Children from parents who have this parenting style are very successful throughout their social/emotional and academic life development. Children learn to trust their feelings, regulate their own

emotions, and solve problems. These children have high self-esteem, learn well, and get along well with others.

Teacher and Student Relationships

O'Connor and McCartney (2007) studied teacher-child relationships and achievement as part of an ecological model of development. They used 1,364 children as a sample, noting their achievement from birth through sixth grade, using Phases I, II, and III data from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Care and Education (NICHD). These scholars used Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecology of human development and Pianta and Walsh's (1996) contextual system models. Their findings are as follows:

- Positive associations were found between the quality of teacher-child relationships and achievement.
- High quality teacher-child relationships buffered children from the negative effects on achievement arising from insecure or other problematic maternal attachment.
- The effect of the quality of teacher-child relationships on achievement was mediated through child and teacher behaviors in the classroom. According to O'Connor and McCartney's (2007) findings, teacher-child relationships have a substantial, independent effect on achievement.

Teachers as Change Agents in Student Academic Achievement

Fullan (1993) asserted the need for education programs to help teacher candidates link the moral purpose that influences them with the tools that will prepare them to

engage in productive change. Fullan pointed out four core capacities for building greater change capacity:

1. Personal vision building—re-examining why we came into teaching. What difference am I trying to make personally? “The qualitative change in the perception of the world can only be achieved in the praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1970, p. 51).
2. Inquiry—all four capacities of change are intimately interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Inquiry is necessary for forming and reforming personal purpose. Teachers as change agents are career-long learners; if they were not, they would not be able to stimulate students to be continuous learners.
3. Mastery is a crucial ingredient. People behave their way into new visions and ideas rather than merely thinking their way into them. Mastery is also a means for achieving deeper understanding. Mastery involves strong initial teacher education and career-long staff development, but when we place it in the perspective of comprehensive change, it is much more than this. To be effective at change, mastery is essential in relation to both specific innovations and personal habits.
4. Collaboration—the ability to collaborate on both a small and large scale is becoming one of the core requisites of postmodern society. Both Fullan (1993) and Edgerson (2006) support the notion that each of these four core capacities has its institutional counterpart: shared vision-building; organizational structures, norms, and practices of inquiry; the development

of increased repertoires of skills and know-how among organizational members; and collaborative work cultures.

Fullan (1993) has noted the dilemma that schools often face: they are expected to engage in continuous renewal, and change expectations are constantly swirling around them. Other matters of concern include the way teachers are trained, the way schools are organized, the way the educational hierarchy operates, and the way political decision makers treat educators. Currently, all of these factors have resulted in a system that is more likely to retain the status quo. He suggests that one way out of this quandary is to make explicit the goals for change and the skills for making them happen.

Teaching Style

Palmer (2007) stated, “I have learned that my gift as a teacher is the ability to dance with my students, to co-create with them a context in which all of us teach and learn” (p. 74). Maslow (1987) once said that any ultimate analysis of human interpersonal relationships including friendship, marriage, etc. demonstrates, first, that basic needs can be satisfied *only* interpersonally and, second, that the satisfactions of these needs are precisely those of the basic therapeutic medicines; namely, the giving of safety, love, belongingness, feelings of worth, and self-esteem. Maslow’s research on this topic propelled him to the conclusion that while a good environment fosters good personalities, this relationship is far from perfect; furthermore, the definition of what is a good environment has to change markedly to stress spiritual and psychological as well as material and economic forces. “Locate a resilient kid and you will also find a caring adult—or several—who has guided him” (Shapiro, Friedman, Meyer, & Loftus, 1996, p. 1, para. 7). Such resilience is why, in the midst of poverty and a chaotic environment,

many high achievers have overcome in their struggle. “Confidence and the will to succeed can enable students to succeed despite powerful odds against them” (Woodard, 1992, p. 57).

Stress and Individual Functioning

Herbert Benson (1975), a medical professor from Harvard University, pointed out the inevitable fact of our rapidly changing world and the resulting demand for many adjustments. The impact of social changes affects all individuals in many ways: Women experience the need to reexamine their own roles and lifestyles against conflicting expectations and suppositions. Men are called to adjust to a new role that may call for more responsibility with family and household as they are forced to view women in a new way that may be threatening to their accustomed role. On the other hand, changes have occurred in the family structure: a high degree of mobility separates families into small nuclear units, and divorce allows children to be raised outside of marriage by fathers. Benson et al. (1975) considered stress to be psychological and physiological, and to be an environmental condition that requires behavioral adjustment. They pointed to rapid cultural change, urbanization and migration, socioeconomic mobility, or uncertainty in the immediate environment as circumstances associated with stress.

Swick and Williams (2006) have said that today’s families face many stressors when the children are young; in particular, stressors like homelessness, violence, and chemical dependence play havoc within families. These scholars pointed out that Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological perspective offers an insightful lens for understanding and supporting families under stress. Swick and Williams presented key elements of Bronfenbrenner’s perspective—specifically, his theory of systems—and applied it to

strategies for effectively helping families under stress. Bronfenbrenner's systems theory includes microsystems, ecosystems, exosystems, macrosystems, and chronosystems. The human world is constituted by these five systems. All of these systems influence family functioning; they are dynamic and interactive, and provide a framework for parents and their children. To meet the needs of families and their children more effectively, it is highly important for professionals and other people who work with children to be aware of the context within this system in which family stressors take place (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Rice, Kang, Weaver, and Howell (2008) have researched the relationship between school connectedness and anger, stress, and coping mechanisms in fourth-grade children. In their study, a sample of 166 fourth-grade students in four elementary schools in a southeastern rural county were randomly selected and assigned to an experimental or control condition. The purpose of the study was to characterize relationships among trait anger, stress, patterns of anger expression, resources for coping, and school connectedness, and to determine if race and gender moderate these relationships in elementary school-aged students. The researcher used self-reporting and standardized instruments. The assessment took place in the fifth week of the school year. The findings show that school connectedness is positively associated with social confidence and behavior control, and negatively associated with trait anger, anger-out, and stress. These findings indicate the protective effect of school connectedness on trait anger, anger-out, and behavior control in school-aged children, regardless of race or gender. The protective effect of school connectedness on stress and social confidence may, however, depend on race.

Multicultural Influences

Ladson-Billings (1995) noted that in discussions about improving education, teacher education, equity, and diversity, little emphasis been given to making pedagogy a central area of investigation. Ladson-Billings challenged notions about the intersection of culture and teaching that rely solely on micro- or macroanalytic perspectives. In her attempts to build on the work done in both of these areas, she proposed a culturally relevant theory of education. Ladson-Billings used the pedagogical practices and reflection of eight teachers of African-American students to define and recognize culturally relevant pedagogy. Ladson-Billings concluded that culturally relevant teaching must meet three criteria: an ability to develop students academically, willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness. She argued that culturally relevant teaching is distinguishable by three broad propositions or conceptions regarding self and other, social relations, and knowledge.

According to Peter McLaren (2009), the concept of culture is essential in the understanding of critical pedagogy. Besides defining culture as a set of practices, ideologies, and values by which different groups make sense of the world, there is the need to recognize how cultural questions help in the understanding of who has power and how it is reproduced and manifested in the social relations that link schooling to the wider social order. Freire (1970, 1985) and Nieto (2004) defined multicultural education in a sociopolitical context; this definition entails a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education. Reforms would involve rejecting racist education and promoting education for social justice, permeating the school's curriculum and

instructional strategies, as well the interactions among teachers, students, and families. Using critical pedagogy as the underlying philosophy means that schools would need to re-conceptualize the nature of teaching and learning.

Noguera (2008) and Perry, Steele, & Hilliard (2003) asserted that awareness of race and the significance of racial difference often begin in early childhood. Racial difference is a challenge for all members of a school community, including teachers, principals, and other administrators. Racial differences must be understood and addressed for the success and the well being of the people in the community (Delpit, 2006). According to Delpit (2006), often, schools do not foster inquiry into who our students really are or encourage teachers to develop links to the often rich home lives of students; yet teachers cannot hope to begin to understand who sits before them unless they can connect with the families and communities from which their students come. To do that, it is vital that teachers and teacher educators explore their own beliefs and attitudes about non White and non middle-class people. Schools in general need to learn to view their non White parents as a resource and not as a problem. One strategy may be to involve the parents of these children in pointing out what the school might do better (Delpit, 2006, 2002).

According to Howard (2010), a number of scholars have asserted that the culture ethnicity learning link is an effective means for increasing student performance, especially for students from culturally diverse backgrounds. Factors influencing student learning include language, migration or non migration patterns, gender, family history, religion, cultural practices, social class structure, and geography. Howard also quoted

some scholars' theories that this cultural discontinuity from home to school is one explanation for lower educational outcomes for students from culturally diverse groups. Ladson-Billings (1994) said that some African-American scholars, (Harlan, 1985) though expressing agreement with critical theorists about schools as a battleground in the struggle for power and the exercise of authority, also noted the failure of these theorists to examine adequately the special historical, social, economic, and political role that race plays in the United States. These scholars noted that such a failure makes for a less-than-complete argument for ultimately improving the educational lives of African Americans. Recently African American scholars, including Hale-Benson (1982, 1985); Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) have begun to look at the specific cultural strengths of African American students and the ways that some teachers leverage these strengths effectively to enhance academic and social achievement. The notion of "cultural relevance" moves beyond language to include other aspects of student and school culture. Culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to affect knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) summarized the work of these scholars when he said, "The problem of race remains America's greatest moral dilemma. When one considers the impact it has upon the nation, its resolution might well determine our destiny" (cited in Koppelman, 2011, p. 188).

Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 2005) and Friere's (1970) works provide the theoretical background for the current study from the perspective of critical pedagogical changes. These two expert educators discussed how pedagogical changes work from the systemic,

curricular, and school structure. They provided valuable insights and an analysis of their own individual approaches in terms of their effectiveness in bringing about change in schools.

The Bio-Ecological Model of Human Development

Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 2005) work informs the current study from the human developmental and interacting systems perspective. Bronfenbrenner highlighted the importance of understanding a person's development within environmental systems, indicating that both the person and the environment affect one another bi-directionally. Bronfenbrenner believed that doing research within natural settings and using theory is extremely important because findings are more useful when they are contextually relevant. Bronfenbrenner (1979) said that "basic science needs public policy even more than public policy needs basic science" (p. 8). The aim of the ecology of human development is "furthering theory, advanced training, and research in the actual environments in which human beings live and grow" (p. xiv). People's abilities and realizations depend to a significant degree upon "the larger social and institutional context of individual activity" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. xv).

Adding the chronosystem (the fifth system) to his ecological system model, Bronfenbrenner (1977/2005) created the Process-Person-Context-Time model, which entails the way people and environment change over time. The emphasis is on the developing person. The PPCT has four interrelated components and the interactions between the concepts form the basis for his theory. The four components are as follows:

1. *Proximal Processes*, which are viewed as the primary mechanism for the development; they involve the fused, dynamic relationship of the

individual and the context. Bronfenbrenner (2005) presented them in two of the central propositions of the bio-ecological model. Proposition II indicates that over the life course, human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving bio-psychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment. To be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of *time*. Such enduring forms of interaction in the immediate environment are referred to as *proximal processes*. Proposition III posits that the form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes producing development vary systematically as a joint function of the characteristics of the *developing person* (including *genetic inheritance*); of the environment—both immediate and more remote—in which the processes are taking place; the nature of the developmental outcomes under consideration; and the continuities and changes occurring in the environment over time, through the life course, and during the historical period in which the person has lived.

2. *The person* includes the individual's repertoire of biological, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral characteristics.
3. *The context* involves five interconnected systems, which are based on Bronfenbrenner's original model ecological system theory. These are microsystem, mesosystem, esosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, as cited in Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

4. *The time*, which is conceptualized as involving the multiple dimensions of temporality. It has a prominent place in this developmental model and encompasses three levels: micro, meso, and macro.

These four components of Bronfenbrenner's formulation of bio-ecological theory constitute a *process-person-context-time* (or PPCT) model for conceptualizing the integrated developmental system and for designing research to study the course of human development.

Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Freire's (1970) pedagogy of the oppressed approach emphasized that to consider the possibility of change, the conditions of oppression need to be treated as limited situations in which both the constraints and the possibilities for action are analyzed in relation to each other. Freire pointed out the importance of recognizing and believing in the capacity of those victimized by poverty and marginalization to act against their conditions when provided with support, appropriate resources, and effective partnership. For Freire, these can be more effective in transforming social reality than any government program or philanthropic endeavor. This awareness is fundamental for adopting a perspective of social conditions needing to be acted upon instead of accepting them fatalistically as fixed and unchangeable.

Freire (1993) asserted that coordinating the work in a department of education requires taking into account both quantitative and qualitative issues. These two types of issues are valuable enough to merit a deep understanding, dynamically and contradictorily. If there is a deficit in one, it must be managed without slighting the other. Freire indicated that expanding the capacity to understand schools' needs will create

pressure for changing the school profile. On the other hand, in the effort to democratize the schools—from the perspective of their internal structure, teacher-students relations, administration-teachers, etc., and their relations with the community wherein each is situated—the aim is to change the face of the schools. During pedagogical changes it is imperative to keep in mind that the working poor are the ones most negatively affected by educational deficits (Freire, 1993, 1970).

Freire (1993) discussed the negative impact of school pedagogical changes on children from disenfranchised families. These children are the most affected by the inequalities in education. For Freire, the educational process, the assessment of knowledge, and the evaluation criteria the school uses to measure students' knowledge necessarily helps children from the so-called privileged social classes. These assessment systems, however, negatively affect children from poor and low socioeconomic backgrounds. In evaluating the knowledge base of children, the mechanism in general never allows for considering the “knowledge from life experience” the children bring with them to school. Thus, children from low socioeconomic backgrounds are at a disadvantage (Freire, 1993, p. 16–17).

Freire (1970) emphasized the need for educators to allow the disenfranchised to regain their sense of humanity and change their living conditions. He believed that for this change to take place, the disenfranchised must have a role in their liberation. Freire (1970) argued that no pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption (p. 60).

The pedagogy of the oppressed is strongly committed to developing a schooling culture that promotes the empowerment of culturally marginalized and economically disenfranchised students. Freire believed that his pedagogical perspective would help transform those classroom structures and practices that perpetuate undemocratic beliefs. In part, because of his lived experience, Freire truly believed in education and in people's right to receive an education. He emphasized discussions of methodology or applications of teaching practice, frankly inserting questions of power, culture, and oppression within the context of schooling. Freire's (1970) pedagogy of the oppressed approach encouraged teachers to create opportunities in which students can come to discover that "there is no historical reality which is not human" (p. 125).

Freire (1993) also stated that early education must be viewed critically and ideologically in the same manner that a child acquires his or her first language and discourse patterns—without conscious reflection or intentional instruction. Freire asserted that children also acquire, from earliest childhood, their ready-made categories of experience. Therefore, to create a critical pedagogy for early education, fundamental changes will be required in the following elements:

- The intellectual preparation of teachers
- The serious study of and reflection upon pedagogy and practice
- The nature, duration, and variety of field-based experiences
- The permanent professional development of teachers in the broadest sense of disciplined enquiry (Freire, 2004, p. 82).

Freire (1970) discussed the negative effect of the dichotomy between teacher-student relationships and the need for its elimination. Controlling social relationships, he

believed, generate a culture of silence that instills a negative, silenced, and suppressed self-image into the powerless. Learners must develop a critical consciousness in order to recognize that their culture of silence is created as oppression. The banking mode of education was a significant notion in Freire's (2004) pedagogy theory. The students are viewed as empty accounts (receiver objects) to be filled by their teacher (the depositor). The teacher controls the students thinking and action. The students are deprived of autonomy to adjust to the world, and their creative power is inhibited.

(Freire, 1970) said that "educator-educand" (p. 70) relationships are those in which educators perceives themselves as the educands' sole educator. He explained that there are two types of classrooms: expository classrooms in which teachers attempt pure transferrals of their accumulated knowledge to the students, and vertical classrooms, in which we find teachers with the following teaching styles:

- The teacher in a spirit of authoritarianism attempts the impossible, in terms of the theory of knowledge, to transfer knowledge.
- The teacher appears not to affect the transfer of content but cancels or hinders the educand's ability to do critical thinking.
- The teacher makes a little presentation of the subject and then the group of students joins with the teacher in an analysis of the presentation. By the introductory exposition, the teacher challenges the students, who thereupon question themselves and question the teacher, and thereby share in exploring and developing the initial exposition. This kind of work may not be regarded as negative or as traditional schooling in the pejorative sense.

- The banker teacher, in conducting a course, adopts a relationship with the subject with of profound, affectionate, almost loving respect, whether that content be constituted of a text composed by the teacher or a text composed by someone else. In this approach, the teacher is modeling how he or she studies, “approaches,” or draws near a given subject, and how he or she thinks critically. The educands need to have already created and developed the critical ability to accompany the teacher’s movements and ideas.

According to Freire (1970), the banking concept of education would keep the oppressed in their state of oppression. To address this problem, education must involve all stakeholders. “It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their views and ours. We must realize that their view of the world reflects their situation in the world” (Freire, 1970, p. 85).

Freire (1998) explained that teacher education and teacher training, which should not be reduced to a purely technical and mechanical process of transferring knowledge, should emphasize the ethical-democratic demands in terms of respecting the thoughts, desires, fears, and curiosity of learners. Such an approach does not mean that teacher is exempt from respect; as an authority, the teacher has a right to establish limits, to propose learning tasks, and to demand accountability. Without these limits teachers run the risk of losing themselves and the class in indulgence in the same way that authority without limits loses control and becomes authoritarianism. Teaching and learning are both a part of the educational process. Freire said that there is no education without the teaching,

systematic or no, of certain content. He emphasized the fact that “teach” is a transitive-relative verb and that it has both a direct and indirect object. The ones who teach, teach something (content) to someone (a pupil). The question that arises is not about education without content. The fundamental problem lies in who chooses the content: on behalf of which persons and things will the “chooser’s” teaching be done, and what is the role of the educands in the programmatic organization of content? What is the role, on various levels, of those at the base? Who will find themselves involved in a school’s educational practices? What is the role of families, social organizations, and the local community? (Freire, 1998, pp. 93–94).

Phenomenology

Phenomenology began in 1918 during War World I with German philosopher Edmund Husserl. Though he was not the first to use the term *phenomenology*, he is considered by many to be the father of that discipline. Husserl (1980) described phenomenology as the “science of pure phenomena,” a science of consciousness (p. 2). The phenomenological approach was created to “lend absolute certainty to a disintegrating civilization” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 54). According to Eagleton, Husserl started his hunt for certainty by provisionally rejecting what he called the “natural attitude.” Husserl believed that objects cannot be regarded as things in themselves but must be considered as things posited, or “intended,” by consciousness. Therefore, to be certain, we must ignore or put in “brackets,” anything that is beyond our consciousness alone. This procedure is done through what Husserl called *phenomenological reduction*. Eagleton noted that “[t]he Greek word for type is *eidos*; and accordingly Husserl speaks of his method as effecting an ‘eidetic’ abstraction, along with its phenomenological

reduction” (1983, p. 56). The aim of phenomenology was a return to the concrete, to solid ground, as its famous slogan says: “Back to the things themselves!” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 56).

The encounter between Husserl and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) was a significant stage in the evolution of phenomenological methodologies. Heidegger was born in Germany and, as with Husserl, philosophy was not his first career choice. While Husserl’s start was in science, Heidegger found his in theology. Heidegger worked and taught with Husserl at Freiberg University, and Husserl trained Heidegger in the processes of phenomenological intentionality and reduction (Lavery, 2003). Later, the recognition that meaning is historical led Heidegger to break with his system of thought. Husserl began with the transcendental subject, whereas Heidegger rejected this starting point and set out instead from a reflection on the irreducible “givenness” of human existence, or *Dasein* as he called it, and because of it his work is characterized as existentialist (p. 62). Eagleton (1983) reported that Heidegger described his philosophical enterprise as a “hermeneutic of Being.” The word “hermeneutic” means the science of art or interpretation (p. 66).

According to Eagleton (1983), Heidegger’s form of philosophy is generally referred to as “hermeneutical phenomenology,” to distinguish it from Husserl’s and his followers’ transcendental phenomenology. Eagleton further pointed out that all phenomenology, including hermeneutic phenomenology, encourages interest in the life world or human experience as it is lived. The main emphasis is on illuminating the details and seemingly trivial aspects within human experience that we may take for granted in our lives, with the goal of creating meaning and achieving a sense of understanding.

According to Moustakas (1994), Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology are similar. One point on which the two philosophers disagree is the manner in which lived experiences should be explored. Husserl concentrated on understanding beings or phenomena while Heidegger focused on *Dasein*, which means "being in the world." The world is the wherein of such being. "Being in the world" has the character of concern. Husserl was interested in acts of attending, perceiving, recalling, and thinking about the world. He understood human beings primarily as knowers, whereas Heidegger, on the other hand, viewed humans as being primarily concerned creatures with an emphasis on their fate in an unknown world.

Overview of the Phenomenological Method

According to van Manen (1990), "Phenomenologists are interested in our lived experience" (p. 9). Husserl (1970, as cited in Patton, p. 24) asserted that the focus of the philosophy of phenomenology is on the lived experience and on transforming this experience into consciousness. According to Patton (2002), phenomenological study is based on "the assumption that there is an essence or essences to shared experience" (p. 25). The task of the phenomenologist is to depict the essence or basic structure of experience by getting at the essence or basic underlying structure of the meaning of an experience, using the phenomenological interview as the primary method of data collection (Patton, 2002). Prior to the interview, to stay objective in the interpretation of the data, refraining from judgment, the researcher uses the *epoché*, which "requires the elimination of suppositions and viewing the phenomena with a newness and openness as if 'seeing' from a new point of view" (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002)). According to Moustakas (1994), researchers must reflect on their own experience, looking at their

dimensions of the experience and becoming aware of personal prejudices, viewpoints, assumptions, and *bracketing*. This is the process of setting aside one's prejudices and assumptions so that the researcher can examine consciousness itself (Patton 2002).

Moustakas (1994) indicated that "what appears in consciousness is the phenomenon, and that which appears provides the impetus for experience and for generating new knowledge" (p. 26). Phenomenological research has two other important strategies: the *phenomenological reduction* entails "continually returning to the essence of the experience to derive from the inner structure or meaning in and of itself" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). *Phenomenological horizontalization* is a process used during the stage of data analysis to examine and treat the data as having equal weight; that is, all pieces of data have equal value at the initial data analysis stage (Patton, 2002).

The phenomenological *epoche*, with its dynamic method and eidetic reduction builds the essential core of the transcendental phenomenological method (Husserl, 1962). Husserl used eidetic phenomenological reduction, which he also called bracketing away/suspending/disconnecting. The purpose of this operation is to reduce momentarily or effectively erase the world of speculation by returning the subject to his or her primordial experience of the matter, whether the object or inquiry is a feeling, an idea, or a perception (Husserl, 1962). Bracketing (*epoche*) is a process of suspending one's judgment or bracketing particular beliefs about the natural world (phenomena) in order to see it clearly. Husserl's method requires the investigator to reduce the natural world to its pure consciousness, so that what is left to the investigator is a pure framework with which to consider the mindset and methodology of phenomenology. Husserl indicated that bracketing is essential for two simple reasons: first, the phenomenological reduction

helps the investigator to free himself or herself from prejudices, thereby securing purity of detachment as an observer, so that the person can encounter “things as they are in themselves” independently of any presuppositions. Second, Husserl believed that the goal of phenomenology should be a descriptive, detached analysis of consciousness, in which objects, as its correlates, are constituted.

Existential-Phenomenology

This dissertation is based on hermeneutic phenomenological methods and guided by van Manen’s (1990) “pedagogic lifeworld.” According to van Manen (1990), the research of lived experience is essentially pedagogic; researchers focus on the exploration of “how we live with children as parents, teachers, or educators” (p. 1). To study these lived experiences, the researchers must create broad, deep philosophical questions that guide them to explain the hidden text of life, such as “ human actions, behaviors, intentions, and experiences as we meet them in the lifeworld” (van Manen, 1990, p. 19) in a situated context.

Van Manen (1990) indicated six research activities that describe phenomenological human science as follows:

1. Identifying a phenomenon that interests and commits us to study
2. Exploring experiences as they are lived instead of as they are conceptualized
3. Reflecting on the central themes characterizing the phenomenon
4. Describing the phenomenon in a narrative
5. Remaining true to the purpose of the original question

6. Balancing the research context by considering how the individual parts contribute to the whole. These are not sequential steps; in actual research, they may occur simultaneously, intermittently, or not at all.

According to van Manen (1990), phenomenology aims at attaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences by inquiring, “What is this or that kind of experience like?” What makes phenomenology unique among many other sciences is its attempt to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world pre-reflectively, with no taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting it, thus offering us the possibility of plausible insights which can put us in a more direct contact with the world (p. 9). In phenomenology, reflection on lived experience is always recollective: we reflect on experience that has already passed or been lived through. People are unable to reflect on their lived experience while living through the experience. All reflection is retrospective. Van Manen (1990) asserted that phenomenology is the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures and the internal meaning of lived experience (p. 10). Phenomenology always asks, “What is the nature or essence of the experience of learning (so that I can now better understand what this particular learning experience is like for these children)?” (p. 10). For van Manen, the theme of lived space (spatiality) is felt space. It is largely pre-verbal; regardless if people reflect on it or not, we know that the space in which we find ourselves affects the way we feel. Lived space is the existential theme that refers us to the world or landscape in which human beings move and find themselves at home (van Manen, 1990). Certain cultural and social conventions associated with space give the experience of space a qualitative dimension. Lived space

helps us uncover more fundamental meaningful dimensions of a lived life (van Manen, 1990).

According to van Manen (1990), the lived body (corporeality) refers to the phenomenological fact that we are always bodily in the world, in our physical or bodily presence, and that consciously or unconsciously we both reveal something about ourselves and conceal something at the same time—not necessarily consciously or deliberately, but rather in spite of ourselves. This notion relates to body language, the way our bodies react to exterior and interior stimuli. “Lived time” (temporality) is subjective time as opposed to clock time or objective time (van Manen, 1990). Lived time is that which appears to speed up when we enjoy ourselves, or slow down when we feel bored, like during an uninteresting lecture, or when we are anxious, as in the dentist’s chair. Lived time is also our temporal way of being in the world. The temporal dimensions of past, present, and future constitute the horizons of a person’s temporal landscape (van Manen, 1990). Lived other (relationality) entails the “lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space that we share with them” (van Manen, 1990, p. 104). As we meet the other, we approach the other in a corporeal way: through a handshake or by gaining an impression of the other in the way that the person is physically present to us. Even if we learn about another person only indirectly (by letter, telephone, or book), we often already have formed a physical impression of the person, which later may be confirmed or it may be negated when we find out, to our surprise, that the person looks very different from the way we expected. In a larger existential sense, human beings have always searched for this experience of the other, for a sense of purpose in life, for meaningfulness, and grounds for living, either in the social or

communal, or in the religious experience of the absolute Other, God (van Manen, 1990). These four existentials—lived body, lived space, lived time, lived relation to the other—can be differentiated, but not separated. They all form an intricate unity which we call the “lifeworld”—our lived world. Considering the pedagogic life with children, one can see that these four existentials allow us to perceive an immediate immense richness of meaning (even if not all parenting experience is necessarily positive—i.e., without grief or worry).

The meaning of parenting and teaching is of profound importance to this study as it is about how we live with children as parents, teachers, or educators (Manen, 1990). The phenomenon of pedagogy can be seen to encompass what is common to the lived experience of parenting and teaching. Manen suggested ignoring the difference and focusing solely on that which includes both teaching and parenting in our lives with children. Similarly, the school is experienced as a special place where the child knows the atmosphere and quality of the classroom, the special desk, the hallway with its locker-spaces where the child meets friends, and so on. In the phenomenon of teaching, “having hope for children” is an essential theme of the experience of teaching (Manen, 1990, p. 109). The parent-child relationship, as well as the teacher-child relationship, is experienced as a special lived relation to the other in the sense that both relations are highly personal and charged with interpersonal significance. In this lived relation the children experience a fundamental sense of support and security that ultimately allows them to become mature and independent persons. In addition, in this lived relation children experience adults’ confidence and trust without which it is difficult to make something themselves.

Summary

If one tries to democratize the schools from the perspective of their internal structure—teacher-students relations, administration-teachers, and so forth—as well as their relations with the communities within which they are situated, one searches to change the face of the schools, and one necessarily grows in the process (Freire, 1993, p. 16). For Freire, a curriculum reform could never be something made, elaborated, thought up by a dozen “experts” whose final results end up in the form of curriculum “packages” to be executed according to instructions and guidelines equally elaborated by the “experts.” Curriculum reform is always a political-pedagogical process, and for him, substantively democratic. In a really progressive, democratic, and non-authoritarian way, one does not change the “face” (p. 19) of schools through the central office. One cannot decree, from today on, that schools will be competent, serious, and joyful. One cannot democratize schools by being an authoritarian. The administration needs to show the faculty and staff that it respects them and that it is not be afraid to acknowledge its limitations. The administration must make clear that it can make mistakes. The one essential thing that it cannot do is lie. In its dealings with the faculty and staff and their respective roles, the administration also must think, organize, and create programs of permanent staff development, counting on the help of those consultants with whom they have been working. A permanent staff development must be based, above all, on reflection about practice. It is through thinking about practice. and through confronting the problems that will emerge in daily practice, that the educator will transcend his or her difficulties with a team of specialists who are scientifically qualified (p. 20).

There is an abundance of literature on parental school involvement. This review began with an examination of the impact of parental involvement on student achievement, looking at the roles that teachers and parents play in the elementary school with students' academic and behavior success. Other aspects explored were parental involvement in urban areas, parental school involvement when the children's school is undergoing a child-centered pedagogical change, teachers' perceptions of the role of parental involvement, and parent-teacher engagement, as well as how this relationship manifests. This review also looked at literature relating to the various theories that will inform the underpinnings of the research methodology and data analysis. In particular, van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenology approach has been described, because it is the primary source that will significantly inform the development of this research methodology. The bio-ecological model of human development and the critical pedagogy/pedagogy of the oppressed models will inform the analysis and interpretation of the data to be collected for this study.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The literature speaks to the fact that how teachers' respond to change is inextricably intertwined with the teachers' lived experiences, and that an understanding of these experiences by school administration can either further or hinder school reform efforts in a school undergoing pedagogical changes. Robert Slavin (1990) asserted that "if you don't deal with both instruction and curriculum and school organization, things start to slide back" (as cited in Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003, p. 88). The school principal's leadership role is critical. Principals wear many different hats during the school day. However, the most effective school principals are those who, in addition to being managers and disciplinarians, are instructional leaders for the school. Successful principals provide a common vision of what good instruction looks like, support teachers with the help and resources they need to be effective in their classrooms, and monitor the performance of teachers and students, with an eye always on the overall goal—to create school cultures or environments in which all children can achieve their full potential (Christensen, 1994; van Roekel, 2008).

In 1859, Charles Darwin's work *The Origin of Species* spoke to the complexity of relations of all animals (including humankind) and plants throughout nature. He asserted that "the struggle will generally be more severe between species of the same genus, when they come into competition with each other, than between species of distinct genera" (p. 65). Bronfenbrenner (1979), in his scientific work, saw the process of human development as shaped by the interaction between an individual and the environment. Thus, it makes sense for Freire (1998) to say that addressing cultural identity has priority over the identification of subjects or educational practice. He spoke to the fact that in the

evolution of the world, “men and women become special and singular beings” (p. 69). Individuals through our long human history have been able to distinguish themselves by their own decisions as individuals among the whole of humanity but still within the workings of society, without which the individuals would not be able to be what they are. However, the reality is that humans are the product of inheritance and interaction with their environment through the years (p. 69).

Freire (1998) asserted that mankind cannot doubt the power of cultural inheritance and cannot doubt that it makes the individual conform and gets in the way of the individual’s being (p. 70). He also said that infrastructure changes sometimes very quickly alter ways of being and thinking that have lasted for a long time. Whereas to recognize the existence of cultural inheritances should imply respect for them, such respect does not in any way mean our adaptation to them. Recognizing them and even having respect for them are fundamental conditions underlying efforts for change. It is necessary to be clear about an obvious fact: these cultural inheritances undeniably cut across social classes. It is in these cultural inheritances that much of our identity is constituted and is thus marked by the social class to which we belong (p. 71). The point of departure in comprehensive practice is to know, to be convinced that education is a political practice. The educator is a politician. In consequence, it is absolutely necessary that educators act in a way consistent with their choice and that educators be ever more scientifically competent, which teaches them how important it is to know the concrete world in which their students live as well as their culture (p. 72).

William Schmidt (2012) asserted that “[a] strong educational system is the key to economic prosperity and equal opportunity” (p. 10). With the slow progress of the U.S. economy, plus the growing disparities of wealth and a decline in social mobility, it is inevitable that the educational system will be expected to play a major role in solving these problems (Schmidt, 2012). Schmidt also noted that reformers have focused on equalizing resources or fostering competition in education, but they have missed the essential problem: the delivery of academic content by teachers to students. The ultimate test of an educational system is whether it makes sure that every student, of whatever background, is exposed to the content needed to compete in today’s society (Schmidt, 2012). Nonetheless, because parents are their children’s first teachers (U. S. Department of Education, 2010), school reform that provides a world-class educational opportunity entails shared responsibility through the collaboration of principals and teachers in a safe and professional environment that welcomes communities and families’ engagement in support of their children’s education.

Bronfenbrenner (2005) wrote that the child’s ability to learn in primary school depends a great deal on the existence and nature of the connection between the school and the home. Parental involvement has also been studied extensively in the literature. Many findings convey that parents’ involvement benefits children’s learning (Chavkin, 1993; Epstein, 1989, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey, Moroney, Shayne, & Weeks, 1984; U. S. Department of Education, 1994) and point to the fact that with the general lack of financial resources leading to massive teacher furloughs, parental involvement has become even more desirable as a way to help facilitate student learning. Parental involvement is a proven means of helping children overcome the barriers to academic

success. Thus, many school educators and administrators have banked on parental involvement to bridge the achievement gap that led to the NCLB Act. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997, 2005 & 2010) developed a model of parental involvement based on a great deal of research, which promotes highly sound practices. Research has shown that between 1999 and 2003, there was a significant increase in parental involvement in school as measured by attendance at general meetings, meetings with a teachers, and school events, as well as volunteering and serving on committees (U. S. Department of Education, 1994).

The goal of the NLCB Act was for children to achieve academic proficiency and attain the needed educational skills for facilitating their success in their adult years. Under this law parents must be informed about ways they can be involved in school improvement efforts and must be given report cards from the schools in their district to help guide their involvement. Thus, schools' education agencies must disseminate literature on effective parent involvement. Schools receiving Title I funding must have written policies, annual meetings, and training in parental involvement. These Title I schools are also called upon to re-evaluate and revise their strategies needed (U. S. Department of Education 2002-03).

As discussed in Chapter I, this study has incorporated a qualitative design in an effort to address the problem, purpose, and questions associated with this study. Following is an outline of the procedure I used to study the above-presented problem at an urban elementary school in Western Pennsylvania, using a qualitative methodology approach. I will further explain the theoretical framework, present my research design, and discuss participant selection, data collection, ethical considerations, data analysis,

and procedures. Creswell (1998) defined qualitative research as “[a]n inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem” (p. 57). The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (p. 15). I chose phenomenology as the research design for this qualitative study because a phenomenological study is appropriate to “describe the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). The study explored the lived experiences of teachers and parents from an elementary school that is undergoing a child-centered pedagogical change process.

In-depth, face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions were conducted with teachers and parents who are personally experiencing the child-centered pedagogical change process. The interviews were the source of data taken from a sample of eight elementary school teachers and nine parents from a school district in Western Pennsylvania. The teachers and the parents were asked to reflect on their experiences during the curriculum change, and opportunities for follow-up questions were provided as new information was uncovered during the interview process. Patton (2002) stated that there are two main divisions of research methods, the quantitative and the qualitative. The quantitative is essentially an experimental design and statistical correlation, while qualitative methodology is a naturalistic design that leads to the emergence of important attributes through an in-depth study of a small sample. Quantitative research tests hypotheses, while qualitative research produces hypotheses. Nevertheless, they both contribute to our knowledge in unique ways. Patton (2002) cited Halcom’s Laws of

Inquiry to make the clear and compelling point that “[q]ualitative inquiry cultivates the most useful of all human capacities—the capacity to learn from others” (p. 7).

Purpose of the Study

The goal of this study was to examine the relationship between parents and their children’s school while the school is undergoing a child-centered pedagogical change and to look at how the engagement between parents and teachers is manifest as well as to identify, if possible, the causes of the incongruous perceptions that often exist between them. Using qualitative methodology to examine the lived experiences of parents and teachers at an urban elementary school located in Western Pennsylvania, I aimed to find common themes, experiences, attitudes, and perceptions among the teachers and parents of kindergarten through sixth-grade students at this urban elementary school. I was particularly interested in examining the essence of the inter- and intrapersonal processes that take place during the daily academic demands made upon the students. What is it like for teachers and parents when they are working with children to meet these academic demands? In addition to exploring teachers’ perceptions of the parents’ role in helping the students with their academic endeavors and the manifestations of engagement between teachers and parents, this study sought to examine how the recent efforts of this urban school district to achieve curriculum enhancement and better teacher training have affected their students’ academic achievement and parental involvement.

Particular attention was placed upon identifying associated risk factors and protective factors, as Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2005) research indicated that the theories of human development that provide the best context for this study are those dealing with such factors as they relate to home and school interaction patterns. Risk factors are the

internal and environmental characteristics that place children at risk for poor developmental outcomes (Doll & Lyon, 1998; Rutter, 1979). Several risk factors have been identified in the research literature at different systemic levels. The child subsystem risk factors include difficult temperament or early antisocial behavior. In the family system, possible risk factors are poor parental bonding, inconsistent discipline, or parental pathology. In the school system risk factors include academic failure, poor relationship with teachers and peers, or multiple school transitions. In the community system, risk includes low socioeconomic status (SES) or high population density. The interaction of various risk factors, particularly the low socioeconomic and high density population, is often linked with specific negative outcomes, such as children having easy access to weapons, witnessing acts of violence, becoming associating with antisocial peers (Cohen & Swift, 1993). The awareness of policy makers, school administrators, teachers, counselors, and parents concerning the effect of risk factors on children is profoundly important: when the children and their caretakers lack the skills to cope effectively with a traumatic or stressful event and if caretakers are not able to protect children from the effects of these stressors, the children are at risk for poor developmental outcomes. On the other hand, protective factors are the social and physical environment characteristics that encourage children's healthy development. In the protective factor umbrella are caring relationships with others, family support, family engagement with schooling, the accessibility of prosocial role models, and safe neighborhoods. Clear and high expectations exist within the community. The school environment is characterized by consistence, enthusiasm, instructional excellence, and academic rigor (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Children's well-being is promoted

when these protective factors become embedded in socializing institutions such as schools. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2003) defined a healthy school environment as one that emphasizes active learning in a climate characterized by interpersonal warmth, promotes equality cooperation, and open communication, encourages creativity among learners, and is free of violence at all levels. Such schools build liaisons with students' home communities by engaging parents and permitting authentic participation in democratic or decision-making processes by stakeholders. A sense of connectedness, good communication, and perceptions of adult caring has been shown to relate to a wide range of mental health outcomes (Patton, 2000).

Bronfenbrenner asserted that risk factors are events in one's life that may potentially interrupt what would otherwise be normal human development. Stress precipitated by one's parents' divorce, parental unemployment, a single parent home, the stresses of a parent's incarceration, a major conflict in the parent/child relationship, etc, might all be considered risk factors. Bronfenbrenner also identified protective factors. These are events that can serve to defend a person from the potentially harmful influence of risk factors. In the case of a student's behavioral or academic failure, for example, helpful peers and strong supervision might serve as protective factors from educational failure.

The purpose of my study was to illuminate the lived experiences of parents and educators of an urban elementary school that is undergoing child-centered pedagogical changes in an era when systematic accountability is required from public education.

There is a sense that curriculum change is required because, as Stanley Aronowitz (2009) asserted, to restore authority, conservative educational policy has forced public schools to abandon child-centered curriculum and pedagogy to focus on measures that hold students

accountable for passing standardized tests and for a definite quantity of school knowledge, as well as imposing performance-based criteria on administrators and teachers. Current research on parental involvement, especially as an aspect of the roles of teachers and parents in children's early education, is extensive. The majority of the research has been conducted with groups of randomly selected teachers and parents using quantitative methodology from which generalizations about the effect of parental involvement on children's academic performances have been drawn. Voluminous research has also been conducted to examine social resources in the family. To date, however, no study has examined the lived experience (i.e., lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived relations) of teachers and parents in terms of their engagement with one another during a time of curriculum change. Nor has any study included the protective and risk factors in the children's environment to help identify, if possible, the causes of the sometimes incongruous perceptions between parents and teachers about parental involvement in children's education.

Rationale

For more than 10 years, I worked as a master level, licensed clinical social worker, working with homeless families, those affected by HIV/AIDS, and those troubled by parent/child conflict, in home-based family psychotherapy and as a hospital social worker. With the addition of my 10 years working in the public school system as an elementary school counselor, I have learned much about the importance of good parenting. Manen (1990) said that one may be a parent in a superficial or mere biological sense, but not in a meaningful sense. It is not enough merely to give birth to a child; in order to be a parent one has to live side-by-side with the child as a true parent. The house

is the location of our shared lived space, the home, which with its immediate environment, offers the child an opportunity to explore the world from a safe haven. A parent who does not understand the meaning of his or her own presence in the child's life threatens the possibility that the child will be allowed to be a child. Manen (1990) describes the parenting relation as one of togetherness, homeness, being there for the child, intimacy, and closeness, living together by growing familiar together. "Having a mothering or fathering relation to a child and being present in a child's life" is an essential theme of parenting (Manen, 1990, p. 109).

Because of my own experiences as a counselor and as a Hispanic mother, parental involvement has always been a matter of great interest to me. Throughout my years of work with families and children, I have often found myself teaching and empowering the parents to advocate on behalf of their children. I often recall how frightened and anxious parents feel when they need to contact the school because their children are experiencing behavioral or academic problems. I also recall the release that parents felt at being able to talk about their affairs and their anxiety related to visiting or talking to school staff. Parents often expressed their certainty that the school viewed them as bad parents. In addition, when parents would ask me to read documents for them that the school had sent them, it was clear that these parents lacked the basic education necessary to deal with the documents. This study has been an effort to explore my long-held assumption that parental involvement is about parent-teacher relationships, about discussion and having a voice, and acquiring it through the educational politics of schools and the reorganization of their budgets. A school can promote equity in a warm and welcoming school environment and can bridge the gap from school to students' homes and communities by

engaging parents in discussing issues related to the education of their children and providing the opportunity for authentic participation in democratic or decision-making processes (Freire, 1970, 1993). A sense of connectedness, good communication, and adult caring has been shown to be related to a wide range of good mental health outcomes (Patton, 2000)

Phenomenology

Scholars in the qualitative research field are concerned with how people make sense of their lives and their worlds. Phenomenology is a qualitative inquiry in which researchers are interested in the individual “lived experience” (van Manen, 1990, p. 9), and their most important goal is to uncover and interpret the meanings of these lifeworld experiences (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 2009; van Manen, 2009). On the other hand, quantitative research aims at classifying, counting, and analyzing numerical data using surveys with closed-ended questions as strategies of inquiry or conducting experiments, as well as using numerical data and inferential statistics for analysis (Creswell, 2008). There is little exploratory inquiry addressing the positive effect of parental involvement in elementary schools undergoing pedagogical change; thus, this topic is appropriate for a qualitative inquiry. Exploring the meaning of teachers’ and parents’ lived experiences of a school undergoing pedagogical changes is important because previous research has emphasized the need for a deeper exploration of teacher-parent relationships, which have a tremendous impact on the effectiveness of parental school involvement. Previous researchers have not focused on identifying parents’ and teachers’ perceptions of school (Epstein, 2011). The phenomenological exploration of teachers’ and parents’ lived experiences will generate information to help deepen the understanding of the challenges

that teachers and parents experience when their school develops and implements pedagogical curriculum changes (Freire, 1970, 1998; van Manen, 1990).

Research Design

Using a phenomenological-existential oriented approach, the study sought to understand the essence of how a child's academic difficulties should be managed, how that experience can manifest itself in teacher-parent engagement, and how well teachers' and parents' perceptions match each other. According to Berg's (2007) observation about the aim of qualitative methodology, the goal in this case was to examine parents and teachers in terms of how they see their relationship in the elementary school setting and how they make sense of the world around them. This aim has been accomplished by examining various aspects of their individual lives, including how they experience, perceive, describe, make sense of, and feel about the phenomenon at hand (Patton, 2002).

Patton (2002) defined the aim of phenomenological research as gaining a deeper understanding or awareness of any phenomenon at hand. From an early age, I have always wondered why people do the things they do. Qualitative research appears to be an effective method to find answers to such questions and to gain a better awareness of phenomena in the life of a person, by asking the question, "What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?" (Patton, 2002, p. 104). Phenomenological inquiry is not to produce generalization, but rather to allow the researcher to explore the meaning of a lived experience (Cresswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; van Manen, 1990). van Manen (1990) explained the difference between theoretical conceptualization of a phenomenon and actively living a phenomenon, stressing that phenomenology provides the opportunity for

“the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world” (p. 9). This study provides the opportunity to uncover valuable insights about the unique lived experiences of teachers and parents in their roles as change agents during an elementary school pedagogical change.

Participants

For the purpose of this study, approximately eight teachers and nine parents were chosen to participate. Berg (2007) has indicated that the underlying logic for using a sample of subjects is to be able to make reasonable inferences about a larger population. The general intent of sampling is to find a small number of individuals who are representative of a larger population, as it is usually impossible to survey everyone who is affected by a particular phenomenon or topic of interest. As Patton (2002) has stated, the researcher should “select information-rich cases strategically and purposefully; the specific type and number of cases selected depends on study purpose and resources” (p. 234). By careful selection, the researcher may learn a great deal about the phenomenon at hand, gaining deeper insights and understanding, although such sampling will not allow for empirical generalization of the findings. My original aim was to choose six to 10 participants (in each of two groups, one for parents and one for teachers). The final number of participants was eight teachers and nine parents, a manageable number that allowed me to be selective. The majority of parents with children in this elementary school are African American and the majority of the teachers teaching in this elementary school are Caucasian. I also took into account the participants’ level of involvement in their child learning. I structured the focus group interviews in a way that facilitated a

diverse and in-depth reflection of the participants' lived experiences, in an effort to attain meaningful input and outcomes.

Purposeful Sampling

As I wished to learn specifically about the lived experience of parents with elementary school-aged children and the children's teachers, I used purposeful selection to compose my sample. Choosing to use purposeful sampling techniques can render information-rich informants whose experiences are specific to the study (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) has stated, "Random probability sampling, typically often used in quantitative research, cannot accomplish what in-depth, purposeful samples accomplish" (p. 245). A sample of willing participants was selected from the population of parents and teachers at an urban elementary school in Western Pennsylvania. I chose this school to do my study because the current lack of parental involvement is a concern for the administrators and the school board. We believe that low parental involvement is making it difficult for the school district to meet AYP standards. I tried to select the study participants carefully in order to maximize the probability that the phenomenon can be better understood.

Sample Size

To gather the pertinent data for this study, I used purposeful sampling of a type suggested by Creswell (1998, 2007), the "criterion" sample. In this type of sampling technique, all participants in the study are affected by the same phenomenon. Participants must have experienced a specific type of change, such as a major pedagogical change. Creswell recommended this type of sampling to assure quality. The size of the sample can be relatively small as Patton (2002) has stated that there is no requirement for sample

size in a qualitative inquiry. The size of the sample depends on what the researcher wants to know, the goal of the inquiry, the phenomenon at hand, what will be useful, what will be believable, and what can be accomplished with the time and resources available. Purpose and sample size should be evaluated according to the purpose and rationale of the study. Researchers must ask themselves if the sampling strategies truly support the study's purpose. Patton (2002) stated that "the validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from a qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with the sample size" (p. 245). Thus, I believed that the selection of between six and 10 participants for this study would be a robust sample, would be manageable, and would provide me with the opportunity to obtain valuable data during individual and focus group interviews. According to Patton (2002), purposeful sampling means that the researcher should "select information-rich cases strategically and purposefully; specific type and number of cases selected depends on study purpose and resources" (p. 243).

Participant selection

A flyer containing a short description of the study, the deadline for answering my request, and my contact information was distributed during parent-teacher conferences. I also posted invitations in the school's visitor waiting room, community newsletter, and elementary school website. I used Moustakas's (1994) essential criteria, which include the following: Participants have experienced the phenomenon, are intensely interested in understanding the nature and meanings of the phenomenon, are willing to participate in a lengthy interview and (perhaps an individual or follow-up interview), and will allow the investigator to record the interview by means of both audio and video, as well as to

publish the data in a dissertation and other publications. The first interested individuals to respond to the invitation were interviewed, face-to-face or by telephone, and provided with a clear explanation of all aspects of the study, including the following: the purpose of the study, participants' confidentiality and information protection, the benefits they would gain from participating in the study, what activities the study would involve, and approximately how much of a time commitment these activities would require. The willing participants were asked about their availability in order to schedule a time to meet with the researcher or participate in a focus group interview. Prior to the scheduled time, a consent form that explained the study was sent to each participant. This consent form also provided information regarding the study procedures, the voluntary nature of participation, the potential risks, benefits, confidentiality of information, and information regarding the researcher. This consent form is further explained in the ethical consideration section of this chapter.

Instrumentation

Many distinguished scholars in the field of qualitative research (Levers, 2001; Patton, 2002; van Manen, 1990) emphasize the researcher's instrumental role within the study. The researcher has the potential to perceive a link between theory and data, and to define a suitable configuration for the analysis. Patton asserted that "the credibility of qualitative methods, therefore hinges to a great extent on the skill, competence, and rigor of the person doing the fieldwork, as well as things going on in a person's life that might prove a distraction" (p. 14). According to Brown (1996, as cited in Patton, 2002), acquiring suitable self-awareness could become a way of "sharpening the instrument" (p. 64).

Researcher as Instrument

My work experience comprises 21 years in the mental health field and public school setting. First, while living in Grand Rapids, Michigan, I worked as a social worker at St. Mary's Hospital for homeless families and their children. I worked as an infant mental health specialist at Grand Rapids Child Guidance Clinic with parents and their infants, 0-5 years old. Soon after I moved to Pennsylvania, I worked as a psychotherapist at the Aliquippa hospital in its home-based services for families and children. Afterwards, I worked as a social worker at the Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh. While working at Children's Hospital, I went back to school for my elementary and secondary school counseling certifications. Right after finishing this training, I got a job with Intermediate Unit One, working as a school social worker in public school special education classrooms. Later, I got a job as an elementary school counselor in the public school setting. Throughout my work experiences, in my role of liaison between families and social systems, including juvenile court and child welfare, I have been puzzled by the struggles experienced by the families, the children, and their schools. Both the home and the school systems are always wondering about each other's roles in the children's learning activities. Parents feel it is the teachers' role to teach the children, and teachers feel that in order to teach the children, they need parents to be involved in helping their children to follow through with school work and reinforcing the importance of children's compliance with the rules. From my observation of the dynamic between these two systems, I became aware of the profound power of relationship building and connecting with people. Relationship building is even more critical when it involves an ethnic minority, disenfranchised families and their children, or a family with a language barrier.

I have never been afraid to seek help when I found myself experiencing difficulties in the therapeutic process with my clients. Supervision has been a valuable way to enhance my training and expertise. I have learned that to have a successful counseling intervention, a teaching lesson, a supervision session, or a consultation session, a well-grounded working relationship needs to be built.

My counseling services umbrella includes assessment, plus group and individual counseling to emotionally impaired students, and I have collaborated with parents, teachers, and community professionals to meet the students' social, emotional, and academic needs. I have often attended school meetings as an advocate for the parents. I am a lifelong student, and I have put my heart and soul into my work. I have always believed that education is the passport to success, and I want all children to be successful. I believe that education is a dance among three people—teacher, parent, and student. At my present job in the school setting, I often listen to parents' stories and hear about their perceived helplessness in trying to help their children. There is a "blame game" going on: teachers point to a lack of parents' involvement with their children's academic performance and behavior, and parents blame the teachers for their lack of success at getting the children to learn and behave. There are many people talking and many lived experiences are being told. However, it seems that no one is listening, either to one another or to the children.

I grew up in a similar environment where nobody listened, and children were expected to do the right things with no questions asked. If not, they would receive a harsh physical punishment. Because of this experience, I began to wonder why people would do the things that they did. For example, why would parents hurt the people that they

were supposed to love and care for? This set the basis for my desire to explore and to learn different ways to deal with similar situations. Beyond that, I wanted to learn the skills to teach parents that there was a different way of relating to their children and managing their behavior.

Later I earned a bachelor's in psychology, a master's degree in social work, and a certification as an elementary and secondary school counselor. Presently, I am earning a doctoral degree in counselor education and supervision. I have been interested in the phenomenon of parental involvement for a long time. I am eager to complete my dissertation research on this topic, and I intend to make parental involvement my preferred topic for future research projects and presentations. I am looking forward to writing a book on parenting. Thus, because of my long involvement in this field, there is no doubt that my personal experiences, training, and work experiences generated the potential for bias to emerge as conducted this study and interpreted the data. The system I used to help prevent or manage the occurrence of bias that could contaminate this study includes the use of a reflective journal, peer supervision, and also consultation with my dissertation chair and committee members. In addition, I used my training as a group leader and supervisor to help facilitate the focus groups effectively. At the beginning of each group, ground rules for confidentiality, turn taking, objectivity, and a non-judgmental environment were discussed. All necessary consent forms were obtained prior to the start of discussion. I used Moustakas's (1994, p. 114) methods of preparation for focus groups as a guide for conducting my focus group and individual interviews.

Data Collection

In qualitative inquiry, data collection refers to gathering the lived experience information (van Manen, 1990). “To make a study of the lived experience of parenting or teaching, one needs to orient oneself in a strong way to the question of the meaning of parenting or teaching” (van Manen, 1990, p. 53). While quantitative inquiry produces “hard” data to show the “needs,” qualitative inquiry yields the “meaning” of the individual lived experience (van Manen, 1990). For this qualitative inquiry, the data gathering sources include a focus group, key informant interviews and participant observation.

The data collection was accomplished primarily through the use of semi-structured interview techniques. Creswell (1998) defined data collection as a “circle” of interrelated activities, a process of engaging in activities that include, but go beyond, collecting data. This process includes finding a research site and participants, getting access and achieving rapport, sampling purposefully, gathering data, recording information, exploring field issues, and storing data. A deeper explanation of the process and the reasoning behind the use of the selected data collection sources and instrument will be discussed below.

Focus Groups

The first phase of the study included two 1.5-hour focus group interviews with nine parents and eight teachers. This is a manageable group size. A focus group typically consists of 7-10 people who are unfamiliar with each other and who are selected because they have certain characteristics in common that relate to the topic of the research question (Marczak & Sewell, 2006). Focus groups may be defined as a method by which

to learn about the psychological and socio-cultural characteristics and processes within a group. A group interview can be used quickly and conveniently to collect data from a number of individuals at the same time (Berg, 2007). The group format will provide participants with the ability to hear other, similar individuals' perspectives, which will enhance the richness of responses received (Berg, 2007). Focus groups have been found to be useful in the investigation of phenomena that are not well understood or researched (Berg, 2007). The nature of a discussion among peers can also promote the use of language specific to the group being studied and a more "real" conversation about the topic, and it will provide the researcher with an opportunity to observe the participants' interaction with one another around the topic (Berg, 2007).

Merriam (2009) states that the information gathered from a focus group is socially constructed within the interaction of the group and that a constructivist perspective stresses the data collection procedure. This is supported by Patton's (2002) statement that [u]nlike a series of one-on-one interviews, in focus groups participants get to hear others' responses and to make additional comments beyond their own original responses as they hear what other people have to say. However, participants need not agree with each other or reach any kind of consensus. Nor is it necessary for people to disagree. The object is to get high-quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others (p. 386).

My work experiences in delivering classroom guidance lessons and group counseling, as well as my training in group leadership and supervision, were valuable assets in helping me to facilitate the focus group discussions. At the beginning of each group, ground rules for confidentiality, turn taking, objectivity, and a non-judgmental

environment were discussed. All necessary consent forms were provided to the participants prior to the start of group discussion. I also used Berg's (2007) checklist of the "basic elements" in a focus group:

1. The objective and the research problem are defined clearly.
2. The group is purposely selected.
3. The researcher creates a safe environment conducive to an open discussion.
4. The facilitator attentively listens to the participants' stories.
5. The facilitator must be prepared and have a clear idea about the process.
6. The facilitator must limit his or her insights or comment to a minimum of 10 percent.
7. The facilitator must point out the need for a second facilitator to serve as an observer.
8. The data should be analyzed using systematic means. (p. 158)

Key Informant Interviews

The second phase consisted of individual interviews with teachers and parents. During the course of the focus group interviews, approximately two to three parents and two to three teachers were selected for one-on-one interviews later. The participants were chosen on the basis of their ability to provide an in-depth description of their lived experiences (van Manen, 1990; Moustakas, 1994). These interviews, which were audio taped, lasted approximately one hour. The interviews were conducted in a private room in the elementary school building. This setting was away from administrators, teachers, and staff in order to promote a sense of privacy, confidentiality, and calm. Prior to each

interview, all consent forms were completed, and the parents and teachers were reminded that participation in the study is voluntary, and that their information would be kept confidential. The format for the interviews was semi-structured in nature.

Berg (2007) asserted that in a phenomenological inquiry the process of interview is just a “conversation with a purpose” (p. 89) to gather information. Scholars who employ qualitative methods often use semi-structured and unstructured interviews. The semi-structured interview consists of a list of open-ended questions that focus on the topics being researched. The essential nature of these questions elicits valuable information from the researcher and the participants. If a participant hesitates or experiences difficulties answering a question, the researcher probes, using one of three methods: a detail-oriented probe, an elaboration probe, or a clarification probe. Probing questions provide interviewers with a way to draw out more complete stories from subjects. The interviewer asks the participant to elaborate on what he or she has already answered in response to a given question (Berg, 2007).

Participant Observational Data

To provide an additional source of data, I took notes, especially during the focus groups, regarding the participants’ physical behaviors, facial expressions, and any other noticeable items of interest that could be lost or missed through audio and video taping and transcription. Participants were informed of the purpose of this note taking. At the end of the group, I completed descriptive notes on each interview in order to recall the setting, interactions, and sequences of each interview in great detail (Creswell 2007). At moments between and after the interviews, when I had random insights or thoughts, I kept track of these by means of a set of memos. All the interviews were audio and video

taped and subsequently transcribed verbatim, which ensured the completeness of recall of the interactions and made the material available in terms of checking for reliability.

Reflective Journal

Reflexivity helps the researcher to be attentive to and conscious of the cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ideological origins of one's own perspective and voice, as well as the perspective and voices of those one interviews, and those to whom one reports. My subjectivity and any potential for bias present in my interpretation of the interview were of eminent importance (Glesne, 2006). I believe that self-awareness is a valuable tool for personal and professional life enhancement, and keeping a reflective journal, adapting Patton's (2002) triangulated inquiry, helped me maintain an awareness of the participants and audience.

Instrument

Interview Questions

To maintain the semi-structured format of the inquiry, seven semi-structured questions were asked of each participant and each focus group. The questions were structured to seek for meaning, not as a task, but as a role, to probe for positive and negative effects and lived experience, and to explore for meaning, purpose, and benefit findings. There were two sets (seven questions each) of questions, one designed specifically for parents and the other for teachers. These questions were asked of each focus group as well as of each individual key informant.

Parent Interview Questions

1. As a parent of an elementary school-age child, what is your and your child's experience with his or her adjustment to the elementary school?

2. With the school remodeling and the frequent curriculum changes, how are your child's behavior and academics affected?
3. What do you need from your child's school to help him or her to be successful in school?
4. What are your hopes and dreams for your child's schooling?
5. How do you perceive your relationship with your child's teachers and school administrators?
6. How would you like to be involved in your child's education?
7. We have covered quite a number of crucial areas. Are there any other aspects that you would like to address that we have not yet covered?

Teacher Interview Questions

1. As an elementary school teacher, how do you perceive the parents' role in their child's education?
2. How do you think the school's remodeling and the frequent curriculum changes affect the students' behavior and academics?
3. What do you need from the parents to help their children to be successful with their schooling?
4. What are your hopes for your students' schooling?
5. How do you perceive your relationship with your students' parents?
6. How would you like parents to be involved in their child's schooling?
7. We have covered quite a number of crucial areas. Are there any other aspects that you would like to address that we have not yet covered?

Semi-structured Interview Format

A semi-structured interview format was used in this study for both focus groups and individual interviews. This format has proven to be an effective approach for eliciting valuable responses from the participants. When deciding between structured, semi-structured, and unstructured formats, I used Berg's *Research Methods for the Social Sciences* (2007) as source material. Whereas the structured approach does not allow for deviations in the question order or content, nor for clarifications or additions, a completely unstructured format offers no cognitive organization for the interview (Berg, 2007). Therefore, I chose a semi-structured approach that allowed the use of beneficial techniques from structured and semi-structured interviews. In the semi-structured interviews, I asked a predetermined set of questions designed to focus the interview on the specific topic or phenomenon of interest (Berg, 2007). The looser structure allowed for changes in the wording of questions, for clarifications, and for questions to be added or deleted between interviews (Berg, 2007).

In this way I was able to continue to use open-ended questions for getting to the heart of the matter. The semi-structured format also permitted me to provide an initial focus for my interviews and focus groups, to have a thread of consistency between sessions, and to allow me the freedom to adapt my interactions to whatever best encouraged my participants to elaborate on their experience. Prior to each interview, all consent forms were completed, and the parents were reminded that participation in the study was voluntary and that their information would be kept confidential.

Data Analysis

A variety of methodologies have been used in the interpretation and analysis of the data in this study. The main focus was to examine the data through the lens of van Manen's (1997) four existentials, which will be used as a guide for reflecting on the data. These existentials, as previously noted, are lived space, lived time, lived body, and lived human relations. The second methodology I used is Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 2005) bio-ecological model of human development. This model facilitates an understanding of the parents' and teachers' lived experiences. Through Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model, the data was interpreted according to the various systems provided by this model, with a special focus on identifying risk and protective factors.

The qualitative research approach is well suited for exploratory investigation of phenomena that are not yet clearly defined within the literature (Creswell, 1998). The phenomenological approach is primarily an attempt to understand the meaning of the experiences of parents and teachers in a Western Pennsylvania school. Phenomenology serves as the rationale behind efforts to understand the parents' and teachers' engagement by entering into their field of perception in order to see life as these parents and teachers see it (Creswell, 1998). The theory of phenomenology explores how a person makes sense of an experience and transforms that experience into his or her own consciousness (Patton, 2002). Humans' life experiences are influenced by factors present in the environment they inhabit. My goal was to illuminate how the parents and teachers in this community make sense of their roles in the children's education and how the parents and teachers manifest their engagement. I used a qualitative design to address the problem, purpose, and questions associated with this study. A phenomenological inquiry is made to pursue, explore, examine, and capture some phenomenon, including how the participants

experienced, perceived, described, made sense of, and felt about the concerning phenomena (Patton, 2002).

This is a qualitative, conceptual phenomenological inquiry grounded in van Manen's (1997) notion of a hermeneutic phenomenology and the lifeworld existential, which emphasizes that "there is a difference between comprehending the project of phenomenology intellectually and understanding it 'from the inside'" (p. 8). Understanding the essence of the participants' lived experience from their worldview is necessary in order to obtain genuine and valid data (van Manen, 1997).

Patton (2002) stated that the challenge of the qualitative analysis lies in making sense of massive amounts of data. This involves reducing the volume of raw information, shifting trivia from significance, identifying significant patterns, and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal (p. 432). Patton also stated that phenomenological analysis seeks to grasp and elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or group of people (p. 483).

To analyze the data gathered for this study, I used van Manen's (1990) method. As suggested by Creswell (2007), this method has been clearly defined according to six characteristics:

1. The researcher begins with a full description of his or her own experience of the phenomenon.
2. The researcher then finds statements (in the interviews) about how individuals are experiencing the topic, lists these significant statements (horizontalization of the data), and treats each statement as having equal

worth, working to develop a list of non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements.

3. These statements are then grouped into “meaning units.” The researcher lists these units, and he or she writes a description of the “textures” (textural description) of the experience—what happened—including verbatim examples.
4. The researcher next reflects on his or her own description and uses imaginative variation or structural description, seeking all possible meanings and divergent perspectives, varying the frames of reference about the phenomenon, and constructing a description of how the phenomenon was experienced.
5. The researcher then constructs an overall description of the meaning and the essence of the experience.
6. This process is followed first for the researcher’s account of the experience and then for that of each participant. After this, a “composite” description is written.

Verification: Validity and Credibility of the Study

To help interpret and explain the data, triangulation theory is used to bring together the different sources of information so that they converge on or conform to one interpretation. With the convergence of information from different sources (documents, interviews and observations), settings and investigators, the researcher can make a powerful argument that the interpretation is credible. According to Patton’s (2002)

suggestion, the validity of this study was strengthened by using a multiple-triangulation methodology, which includes the following:

- Multiple theoretical perspective
- Analytical triangulation
- Methods triangulation.

The multiple triangulation perspective uses different theoretical sources to examine the same data. For this purpose, I have used van Manen's (1990) four lifeworld existentials, Paulo Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bio-ecological model of human development. The analytical triangulation consists of using multiple analysts' sources of data while investigator triangulation uses evaluators to analyze and interpret the data. The participants' feedback was also solicited at the end of each individual and focus group interview. Methods triangulation is the use of methods to study a single question or phenomena. Patton (2002) stated that triangulating multiple sources of data allows the researcher to produce more credible data; "[u]nderstanding inconsistencies in findings across different kinds of data can be illuminative and important" (p. 556).

Patton's (2002) "dependability" involves developing processes that are to be followed systematically in conducting the study. "Authenticity" describes the processes of being reflexive in considering one's own bias, considering and appreciating the perspectives of others, and striving to be as fair and precise as possible when describing the experiences and perspectives of others (Patton, 2002). Triangulation methods will be used to establish validity, as Berg (2007) and (Patton (2002) stated that the use of

triangulation is an accepted method of establishing validity in qualitative research. Berg (2007) defined triangulation as “the use of multiple lines of sight” (p. 5).

Procedures

The guiding principle of sampling in qualitative research is one of convenience; however, the availability of people willing to allow the researcher to collect data about them is of high importance. Another main issue with sampling is whether or not readers will trust the findings. Therefore, providing information on how the researcher collected evidence, particularly in relation to how and why particular persons were selected, and detailed description about the process of gaining access and selection of the research participants is of paramount importance (Lincoln & Cuba, 1985).

This study was conducted at an urban elementary school located in Western Pennsylvania. The human sample for this study was teachers of kindergarten through sixth-grade students who presently teach at the school and parents who have a child enrolled at this urban elementary school. Berg (2007) has stated that “gaining entry, or getting in, to a research locale or setting can be fraught with difficulties, and researchers need to remain flexible concerning their tactics and strategies” (p. 184). I, however, did not have any difficulty in gaining access to the human samples.

My strategy to gain entry to the research field and the participants was as follows. First, I talked to senior administrators in the school district and on the school board, and second, I invited teachers and parents to participate in this study. I designed a flyer with information on the purpose of the study, date, schedule sessions of the focus group. It also contained information about a \$50 dollar gift card drawing in each of the parents’ and teachers’ groups in gratitude for their participation, as well as my contact information for follow-up if needed. I distributed the flyers during parent/teacher conferences and posted the flyer at the school entrance. As I gathered replies from interested parents and

teachers, I spoke to them either by phone or face to face, followed by a letter with an official invitation to willing participants. During the recruitment stage, I explained the purpose of the study and my desire to obtain participation from individuals who believe their children/students are experiencing academic difficulties. Individuals who responded and agreed to participate were contacted, and the interviews were scheduled.

The focus-group and individual interviews both consisted of two parts: The first was a brief session to ensure that the participants had a clear understanding of the purpose of the study; to review the ethical issues pertinent to informed consent, confidentiality, mental health services, and the benefits of the study; and to remind the participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time they wish to do so. The second interview was more in-depth and followed the semi-structured interview format. After each interview, the electronic recordings were transcribed verbatim, and field notes were completed so that I could begin the data collection and analysis procedures. Upon review, interview notes and information contained in my reflective journal were inserted into the margins of the transcript, where appropriate, in order to provide as clear a picture and as rich a description of the session as possible. I also reviewed the interview tapes as many times as needed to be certain that the transcription and field notes reflect an accurate account of the experience. So that the transcript would be as accurate as possible, a professional transcriptionist was hired to transcribe all of the focus-group and individual interviews.

I analyzed the data and compared it to the compiled field notes for accuracy. A summary analysis of each interview was given to the participants for feedback and evaluation. Allowing the participants to review the data analysis is a method used to

minimize researcher error and bias. Specifically, this method allows the original interviewee to interpret the data and to confirm or reject the interpretations and conclusions.

This procedure was repeated for each interview, and the data was analyzed according to the established process. Following the participants' evaluation of the analysis, they were thanked for their participation, and were provided with my contact information in case they wish to ask further questions or discuss unresolved concerns.

Ethical Considerations

This is human subject research, and therefore, several ethical considerations were needed assure the safety of all participants. These ethical considerations include issues related to informed consent, privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality. I provided detailed information regarding the nature and purpose of the study in response to participants' questions prior to selecting the participants, as well as during the study and following the analysis of data. Because minimal risks were involved in terms of the health and well-being of the participants, they were provided with information about their right to terminate an interview at any time if the need should arise, or if they needed immediate therapeutic support or referral for psychotherapeutic help. In all studies, the designs and processes of data collection must be open for discussion. Information considered to be private or possibly damaging has been removed or disguised to protect the identity of the research participant. Confidentiality is at all times maintained relevant to the data to be used unless the participant is fully informed and agrees to its use. The importance of self-reports in data collection was emphasized so that the research participants felt that their contributions are valued as new knowledge on the topic and as an illumination of the

meanings inherent in the questions. The research participants also reviewed and confirmed or altered the research data to correspond to their perceptions of the experience.

Informed Consent

Following Creswell's (2007) assertion on researchers' obligations to conduct studies according to the highest ethical standards of human science research, I have provided interested individuals with a clear explanation of the purpose of the study, of how their confidentiality and information would be protected, of the activities involved with the study, and of approximately how much time the activities would involve.

Willing participants were asked about their availability and were scheduled for a specific time to participate in a focus group. Prior to the scheduled time, each participant in the phenomenology study was provided with a consent form and a letter explaining the study: the purpose of the study, the study procedures, the voluntary nature of participation, the potential risks and benefits, the confidentiality of information, and some information regarding the researcher.

Privacy, Anonymity, and Confidentiality

This study was carried out in full compliance with the regulation of the Institutional Review Board at Duquesne University (IRB) and the American School Counselor (ASCA) Ethical Standards. In preparation for the IRB and in order to ground the study in an ethical framework, I took the IRB test to obtain the required IRB certification and reviewed the American Counseling Association Code of Professional Ethics (Patton, 2002). The ethical issues include explaining the purpose of the study, promises and reciprocity, risk assessment, informed consent, proper treatment of subject

participants, confidentiality, data access and ownership, advice, data collection, boundaries, data storage and retention, ethical versus legal considerations and the reporting of findings.

Glesne (2006) has emphasized concerns regarding the nature of relationships with research participants in a qualitative inquiry, indicating that “traditional research relationships are generally asymmetrical, with power disproportionately located on the side of the researcher. Consequently, researchers must consciously consider and protect the rights of participants to privacy” (p. 138). The participants’ right to privacy is their foremost concern. Once the participants either agree or decline to participate in a study, they expect the researcher to preserve their confidence and anonymity throughout data gathering and during the writing-up phase of the qualitative inquiry process (Glesne, 2006). Punch (2004) has also indicated that “concerns about research ethics revolve around various issues of harm, consent, privacy, and the confidentiality of data” (as cited in Berg, 2007, p. 53).

Limitations of the Study

Glesne (2006) asserted that “demonstrating the trustworthiness” of a research inquiry includes understanding the limitations of the study. Contextual delineation of the limitations of the study helps inform the reader and encourage appropriate use of the research findings (Glesne, 2006). The main limitation of this study is its lack of ability to be generalized (Manen, 1990). The target sample for this study is a small sample of teachers and parents. At this western Pennsylvania school, 70% of the student body population is low income and African American, and the majority of the teachers are white, middle-class persons who may not always understand the needs of at-risk children.

Conversely, the parents may not always understand why the school is doing what it is doing. Thus, there may be both cultural and “ideological differences.” Researchers have also pointed to the failure of college universities to provide teachers with the appropriate training to work effectively with disfranchised children and their families (Fullan, 1993).

This study explored meanings through the examination of the lived experiences of parents and teachers in the change reform undergone in an impoverished, performance struggling urban school district. Experts, school administrators, teachers, community members and parents came together to address the barriers hindering the school district reform improvement. First, Horacio Sanchez worked with the teachers and school administrators, imparting the most effective strategies for establishing high performance programs, using a neurobiologically-based approach to help students close the achievement gap. Second, Mutiu Fagbayi worked with teachers, administrators, and parents in developing strategies to keep the focus on learning and teaching. Third, Payne, met with teachers and administrators to gain a better understanding of the challenges of working with children in poverty. Fourth, experts in the field of school counseling assisted with the implementation of a school-wide positive behavior plan and to restructure the counseling department so that it approximates the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model. Although, valuable initiatives have been implemented, most of them had a short life span, and the school district continues to experience difficulties meeting the Department of Education Academic Yearly Progress (AYP).

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter presents the analysis of a study on the lived experiences of eight teachers and nine parents from an urban elementary school located in western Pennsylvania. This chapter presents demographic information on the participants, discusses presuppositions, and presents a narrative analysis of both the group and individual transcripts, along with tables of organized significant quotations and analytic units.

The analysis of the data collected in this study follows the model described by van Manen (1990, 1997), as discussed in the previous chapter. In this process, the researcher seeks an understanding of the participants' stories by identifying themes emerging from the interviews and determining how these themes relate to the research questions. After common themes are identified and analyzed, they are used in Chapter 5 to explore the dimensions of the phenomena. During the process of reduction, I watched and listened to the audio recordings and read the transcripts of the interviews several times, identifying and highlighting themes and thematic statements that are essential to or revealing about the research question. After essential themes and thematic statements were analyzed and isolated, the data was organized in graphic representation. As I analyzed each of the interviews, I took time to reflect and in reflecting on what I had heard and observed, I asked myself, "What existential question does this story answer? This was a constant question while I identified common or unique themes, patterns, and similarities for drawing conclusions. I summarized each interview and used data triangulation to compare the data gathered from the two focus groups of teachers and parents and the six teacher and parent individual interviews.

Participant Demographics

There were eight teacher participants in this study, seven female and one male. Seven of the participants were Caucasian and one was African-American, ranging from 37 to 57 years of age. Two of the teachers have a master's degree in science education; six of them have a bachelor of science in education. The eight participants were all teachers at the selected urban school, five of them for 11-13 years, two for over 21 years, and one for nine years. There were nine parents, eight of them female and one male. Six of the parents were African-American and three were Caucasian, ranging from 34 to 41 years of age. Three of the parents have a bachelor's degree, one in social work, one in business, and one in science in education. Six have a high school diploma. Five of the nine parents work at the selected urban elementary school, three of them as teacher's aides, two in the cafeteria (food service). One is a social worker in the legal system, and one works in business administration; the other two are unemployed. All of these participants were involved parents who have a child enrolled in this urban elementary school. The interviews lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours. The length of the interview depended on the level of engagement with the participants in the discussion process. All interviews were conducted at the urban elementary school after school had been dismissed, in a classroom located in an isolated area of the school building in order to provide the participants with a sense of privacy and confidentiality.

At the beginning of each interview, the participants were provided with a review of their consent to participate in a research study and were given an opportunity to ask questions. Participants were asked to share their first names, and they were assured by the researcher that their first name would be replaced by an alphanumeric code such as P1,

P2...etc., to maintain their privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality. Table 1 provides a summary of the demographic information of each participant.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participants' Demographic Characteristics	
Age Range	Teachers: 37–57
	Parents: 34–57
Gender	2 males
	15 females
Ethnicity/Race	7 African Americans
	10 Caucasians
Number of years teaching experience	9 years: 1
	11–13 years: 5
	21+ years: 2
Teachers' education	6 BS Degree
	2 MA Degree
Parents employment	7 employed
	2 unemployed
Parents' education	6 High school diploma
	1 BS in social work
	1 BS in business
	1 BS in education

Bracketing my Own Presuppositions

Many experts in the field (Levers, 2001; Patton, 2002), point out that the researcher is an “instrument.” In this regard, one researcher says that “developing appropriate self-awareness can be a form of ‘sharpening the instrument’” (Brown, 1996, p. 43, as cited in Patton, 2002, p. 64). The reflexivity process calls upon researchers “to be attentive to and conscious of the cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ideological origins of one’s own perspective and voices of those one interviews and those to whom one reports” (Patton, 2002, p. 65). As I became immersed in the study of parent and teacher relationships, reflexivity became a valuable tool that not only enhanced my research and professional expertise, but also my body, mind and soul in a meaningful interaction with the world around me. Therefore, understanding the importance of being “consciously aware” (Hycner, 1985, p. 281) of any existent presuppositions to avoid or reduce the potential for bias into the interpretations of the data, I fulfilled this expectation by exercising ongoing reflective thought, journaling, and consultation with my dissertation chair and members of my dissertation committee throughout this study process.

As I went through the research process experience, I was sure that participants in this study would describe elements of school demands as a frequent source of teacher and parent conflict concerning students’ academic and behavior. I expected that, as the literature describes, teachers and parents would express having experienced shifts in their basic cognitive ideas related to culture, parent role, safety, parents/child relationship, teacher/parent relationship, children’s basic and intellectual needs, poverty, uneducated parents, and parent involvement (Epstein, 2005). I am a parent, and I am the school

counselor. In my role of counselor, when there is a conflict, I hear about the concern from the child, the teacher, and the parents, and then I assist them in finding solutions.

Based on my own experience and the suggestions regarding parental school involvement in the current literature, I believed that teachers and parents would agree that it does make a difference when parents and teachers work together in helping the child with their school demands. My experience as a school counselor has conditioned me to expect that many times, parents and/or teachers tend to focus on the negative aspects of situations and interactions with each other and with the children. During the interview process, I remained mindful of this tendency with the hope to elicit genuine, heartfelt descriptions of each participant's experience.

Throughout the study, I used a reflective journal and consulted with my dissertation chair and members of my dissertation committee, and I continually attempted to be aware of my biases and presuppositions in order to sort my own beliefs so that the true meaning of the data could emerge. I tried my best to remain detached from the discussion during both the focus groups and the key informant interviews. I provided limited prompts, just enough to keep the content focused on the topic. At times, I became aware of my own thoughts regarding the potential outcome of the interviews. For example, at the start of the teacher focus group interview, most of the participants were anxious about being audio and video taped. The atmosphere in the room was tense, and I felt discouraged, became self-conscious about my Spanish accent, and started to wonder if the participants understood the research questions because many of them were not providing the information I expected or wanted. Participants asked me to repeat certain questions, which I did. I did not want to provide the participants with leading questions

that I thought might push them to give me the responses I desired. However, after some discussion, the atmosphere changed in the room; everyone became more relaxed and appeared to forget completely about the audio and video recording. Some participants shared personal (family) experiences that helped them to have an empathic understanding of parents. On the positive side, during the Teacher Focus Group, which was the first one, I found it necessary to restrain myself from allowing my elation to become evident when the group members quickly began to discuss themes that I had hoped would be revealed in the study. I wanted to ensure that my emotional reactions did not interfere with or influence the process or content of the focus group; however, I often found myself giving positive acknowledgement to participants: for example, I would say “awesome,” “beautiful,” “valuable information,” etc.

Data Analysis

The data analysis involved analyzing the teachers’ and parents’ experiences to determine common themes related to a particular school that is undergoing child-centered pedagogical changes. The unit of analysis in the study was elementary school teachers and involved parents. The goal of the current study was (a) to examine the relationship between parents and teachers at their children’s school while the school is undergoing a child-centered pedagogical change in order to identify, if possible, the causes of the misunderstandings that sometimes occur; (b) to examine the interpersonal and intrapersonal processes arising from the daily academic demands upon the students; and (c) to examine parental involvement and attempt to show how the recent efforts of the school district’s new curriculum enhancement and teacher training have affected the

students' academic achievement by analyzing teachers' and parents' positive and negative experiences.

The process of analyzing the data collected in this study followed the model described by van Manen's (1990) lifeworld existential. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) work informs the current study from the human developmental and interacting systems perspective, and Freire's (1970) pedagogy of the oppressed schema is also used. These theoretical underpinnings are explained in previous chapters.

In becoming immersed in the data analysis, I started by reading the transcripts at the same time that I listened to and watched the video and audio recordings. I used van Manen's (1990, 1997) "highlighting approach" as I looked for statements in the transcript that were particularly revealing about the experiences being described by the participants. I highlighted the elements descriptively expressed in the material that directly pertain to the phenomenon, and eliminated all other elements that were not related to the phenomenon. Through this process I obtained a list of themes, some of them better formulated than others, and some more revealing about the experience than others. I reviewed the data over and over to refine the phrasing of the themes and to confirm their relevance. After working with each interview transcript, I broadened my attention and compared the themes from one transcript with those from the others. Then I explored them to seek "common themes" that are shared among the participants in my study. Van Manen (1990) uses the metaphor of discovering the "knots in the web" (p. 90) to describe the activity of finding common themes. Throughout the process of the isolation of themes, I often asked myself the question, "Is this phenomenon still the same if we

imaginatively change or delete this theme from the phenomenon?” (van Manen, 1990, p. 107).

What follows is a narrative discussion of the focus groups and key informant interviews. First, I discuss the teachers’ focus groups, followed by the teachers’ key informant interviews. Second, I discuss the parents’ focus group followed by the parents’ key informant interviews. The account of the study interviews provide an illustration of the six categories previously explained.

Teachers’ Focus Group Interview

In the data gathering during both the group and key informant interviews, specific induction protocols were used that include an explanation of the focus group and key informant interview process. The following is a narrative concerning the responses in the teacher focus group interview questions that were posed to the teachers during the focus group interview.

The participants all knew each other, and they all work at the school elementary school. Seven of the participants arrived on time to the interview, and the eighth arrived 5 to 10 minutes after it started. Even though each one of them had been informed that the interview would be audio and video recorded, when they entered the meeting room they appeared tense, and some of them would whisper to each other while looking toward the researcher and the recorders. I took time to review the consent to participate (see Appendix J) and to answer any questions participant might have had. I asked them to introduce themselves by their first name and assured them their first name would be replaced by a P#. The tension in the group lasted through the first question. By the second question, all participants appeared to be more at ease. Sometimes, some of the

participants appeared not to understand the question fully. I would then repeat the question in a similar way but using different words. I noticed being conscious of the challenge because English is my second language, which increased my anxiety from thinking that I had failed in providing the participants with clear information about the purpose of this study. Throughout the interview, I often failed to understand a particular point made by one of the participants, and I would ask for clarification, always being careful not to ask leading questions. The second question brought further understanding and with it a valuable level of engagement from the participants. The interview lasted 1.15 hours. Participant #2 left the meeting 15 minutes early because of a previous commitment. All participants appeared and reported feeling relaxed after being able to talk about the various concerns they often experienced in their work; they talked about the need for similar meetings on an on-going basis.

As I started the interview by inviting the participants to express their perception of the parents' role in the child's education, there was some confusion about the question at first when P1 and P8 experienced difficulty in understanding the question. I then repeated the question in similar way but using different words. P3 responded, indicating that the role of the parents' is "Very important." P4 mentioned a frequent concern of many teachers, saying, "I have some parents that are very involved and call and check up. And then I have parents that I call and call and call, and [they] never return calls or notes." P5 enthusiastically reported perceiving the parents' role in their child's education to be "more like cheerleaders. Like, I don't expect them to do the actual teaching, but they need to be the ones providing the motivation...."

The teachers concurred that the parents' role is very important, even vital. They agreed that parents should be a support system—make sure the children get to school, have their homework done, are fed, etc. and that they reinforce what is being taught, as P8 said, “so that we ... don't have to feel like we're doing everything.” They spoke of how difficult it is to work with children when there is no support at home and of what a big difference it makes “especially with the discipline—if you have a parent that backs you up and supports you and carries through with something at home” (P1). They were agreed that parental involvement seems to go down as the children progress through school.

The teachers also agreed, though, that changes in curriculum can be problematic in terms of homework; they referred to math as an example of curriculum that has changes so drastically that it is understandable if there is parental confusion over how to help their kids with it. P1 referred to math as the one constant that changes all the time regardless of the school district. She said, “My daughter had so many different ways to divide or to multiply or whatever that – you know, I wasn't sure how she was being taught, so....” With emotion, P1 said, “That can be... that can be overwhelming.” Her words provoked a great deal of participant reaction, some of them talking over one another. P8 said, “And repetitious, too. That's how I was taught. Repetitious. Over and over and over again. Our math program is so different.” P1 followed by saying that she thought “sometimes our parents are intimidated by homework because maybe they don't understand it; ...when they went through the school system, they didn't do it that way.”

Another important factor was pointed out by P8, who said, “And then you have those parents that work late.” She shared that some of her students come into the

classroom saying, “Well, I didn’t do it because my mom was at work. I didn’t have nobody to help me.” Homework is a concern for all teachers because it is a part of the student’s grade. P1 shared that to engage parents she always reassured them by saying:

“If you don’t understand the homework...,” because I think sometimes, and I myself, there were times when my daughter brought things home and I didn’t know what to do, or I didn’t – or I wasn’t sure what was expected, I would just write on there, “Wasn’t real sure.” And my daughter couldn’t explain it to me, either. “If you don’t know – because I didn’t, either. There were times when I didn’t, either. So just let us know. Just let us know that you at least looked at it, but you weren’t sure what to do.” Parents are more likely to even look at the homework and get involved as opposed to just saying, “I didn’t do it that way. I don’t know how to do it, so I don’t even want to look at it.”

At this point it seemed that this discussion of teachers’ perceptions on parents’ role in children’s learning was exhausted and that it was time to move on to the next inquiry, which had to do with school physical remodeling and curriculum changes. I engaged the participant in the discussion of the effect of the school’s remodeling and the frequent curriculum changes on the students’ behavior and academics. At first the participants, with humor and laughter and dramatic expressions, shared their lived experiences through the remodeling stages. P3 said, “I know... the one thing I love is the air conditioning. I think back to when it was 100 degrees and we were dying,” P1 added. “And [we] open[ed] up the windows and all the bees flew in and wasps flew in.” P8 said, “Then the kids screaming, ‘Ahh, ahh!’”

Aside from agreement that the air conditioning is great, the teachers were not positive about the building-remodeling project. They seemed to feel that the new layout isn't as conducive to learning and that it spawns problems with the older kids. P1 remarked that she didn't like having the 5th and 6th graders in the same building now because it created a different dynamic. She said, "I think it changed some of the behaviors of the ... kids when they looked at their older brothers and sisters." They also agreed that such changes were hard on the kids. P5 said,

Like I know the afternoons are always a lot harder to get the kids focused because they've been down to lunch, and the cafeteria has not been designed in a way that fosters school-type behavior. I think when they're in the cafeteria, they've got a lot of behaviors that they shouldn't be displaying here. Because of the way that it's set up. I think some of the rooms, you know, lockers are around the corner. I think there's some things that—I don't, I don't—it just adds to the potential for distraction and disturbance, the way some of the layouts are.

"And the square footage is too small for 5th and 6th grade. The amount of kids that we have in there now...." P6 added. Even more negative comments emerged in the discussion about the curriculum. Many felt that there is constant change, so that no one can ever get used to anything. P1 and P6 both agreed with P5 about students and transition when she said,

And I think that, I think that our student population, because they look to school to be something they can rely on as being consistent and routine, so I think when we do make changes, it does affect them a lot. They have a hard time dealing with switching a teacher or changing classes. I know that I always see more

success the longer they're in the room, just with me. When there's movement, it just disturbs them a little bit.

This last argument created an appropriate transition to discussing curriculum changes. P6 shared his belief that curriculum changes have an effect on the teachers that later manifests in the students. He said, "Things change so quickly that we rarely get a chance to come to grasp with that thing that we were teaching them for a couple years." The obvious felt emotions prompted additional thoughts from P8, who said, "I'm still grasping." P6 continued his argument saying, "And there's not always training." Several of the teachers concurred, noting that "they change our grade levels" (P3) and that "... everybody is doing something different, too. There's no continuity in a lot of it" (P1). In closing the argument P6 said, "So to me that's more of a problem than the physical part of the building, is the curriculum."

Because it seemed that the curriculum changes were a big issue for the participants, I re-engaged them in a deeper discussion. P8 spontaneously spoke of teaching in 1st grade for 18 years and then being suddenly moved to 2nd grade; she noted that she feels as if she's still adjusting—as though it's back to being a first-year teacher all over again. She said, "When he told me I was moving, you could have thought I had just lost somebody because I was so like, 'Oh my God. You're moving me.'"

It quickly became evident, following comments about being moved to a different grade, that teachers do not feel supported by the administration. P7 gave some specifics about the lack of support: the school provides no adequate instruction for teachers when they are changed from one grade level to another and no mentor system, as in other

school districts. P6 agreed, noting that changes create chaos for both teachers and kids, to which P7 replied,

And I think we fight that. It's a back and forth battle that we're constantly fighting. We need to learn something new. They need to – we have our responsibilities to teach them what is appropriate, at that appropriate grade level, but with not knowing what we're teaching, how to teach it and trying to just pull things out of there makes a big struggle, I think, for our district.

P1 mentioned the lack of continuity, rising from the fact that everyone is doing something different; in addition, supplies are lacking, and much money is being wasted.

P1 said,

My father was an administrator for as long as I know, and you know, he said to me, "I would've never moved a teacher if they didn't want to move." He said, "A happy cow makes good milk." [laughter] And there's some truth to that, you know? So I think that is one of the things that we, we fight sometimes here in this district with just so many of us sitting around her has just been moved. And some more than others, I realize.

When the discussion turned back to architecture, there was some consensus that parental involvement is needed to help control the kids. There were also some comments about how the demographics of the school's area are an obvious drawback when it comes to money for remodeling, etc.

Later (in a discussion of another question) P1 made the comment that when there's a curriculum change, the teachers are almost never consulted. The teachers agreed that their opinions are not valued when it comes either to the curriculum or to buying

supplies: “when they’re purchasing things or having us look at because we’re the ones doing the job. I don’t think that we’re always held as experts” (P5).

When the group members moved to a discussion of what teachers need from the parents to help children be successful with their schooling, many suggestions were made here: the parents’ time—reading and listening to their children, helping them with homework, etc.; communication between parents and teachers, such as a phone call now and then; cooperation when the kids are getting negative feedback (parents need to show up to take care of a problem and not avoid the teacher, etc.); and, finally, parental regard of education as important. Success has more to do with the attitude at home toward school than with how bright the child is. There was a strong consensus that cheerleading, coaching, and support are badly needed from the parents because the foundation of the child’s education is in the home. Teachers need the parents to support and value their children’s school work as much as they tend to support and value their children’s sport activities or the child’s birthday celebration: as P3 said, “Then those lights go on; on Friday night, they’re out, they’re supporting that football team, though. We need that same support at school.” P4 added, “Or [or] a child’s birthday party. [laughs] With the cupcakes.” The teachers underscored their point about home support by reminiscing and unanimously agreeing about their growing up years and about how their parents set a priority on homework over watching TV:

My mom and dad didn’t turn on the TV unless we all had our homework done. I mean, I didn’t even do that as a parent. You know, but there was, there was some real value in that, you know. They, they, that [that] was telling us how important homework was because nobody did anything until homework was done. (P1)

The teachers also agreed that the parents don't always know what their job is, and that they tend to feel intimidated by teachers and other school personnel. A teacher parent (P4) illustrated this idea by telling about a meeting she attended for her child with five people on "the other side of the table" wherein she felt like an idiot. She said:

I'm going to [be] the devil's advocate. Because, being on the educational side, teaching is my profession. It's easy for me to know what the expectations are. But then having a young child that can't read, I mean, cannot read, and from a parent's point of view, we don't have enough time to communicate as much as we wanted to our parents. And then parents who are not in education don't always know how to handle it because, not saying education is not important and all of that, but like they don't always know the guidance or what we need from them. And now, I mean personally, now I'm hitting heads with my child's special ed teacher because here I am a professional, and I'm saying—and I don't mean to get personal, I'm just using it as an example. But like I know that my child needs this, this, and this to get his basic foundations back to read. And then his special ed teacher is like, "Well, if we knew what was in those children's minds, then our job would be easier." And almost like everything is put back on me. "Well, you just need to do that at home," type of thing. So I guess what I'm trying to say is we, as professionals, know what parents, we feel that parents should do. But at the same time, parents don't always know what their job description is. Does that make sense?

She also observed that parents feel, even though teachers say "We're here to help your child," that their ideas aren't valued.

P4 also brought up the issue of lack of community—she has found out that there's more support at home than she realizes, but the problem is she doesn't know the families. Teachers and families need to know each other on a personal level. P4 also made mention of a communication factor, she said, "Well, the way they communicate is different than the way we communicate. And not that they're unprofessional, but you know, there's just—I think it goes back to, you don't feel intimidated because there's not that barrier there." Thus, there was strong agreement that one couldn't blame parents for feeling intimidated.

As we engaged in a discussion of the teachers' hopes for their students' schooling, participants unanimously stated that they hope their students will be "proficient"—maybe not in a way that can be benchmarked, but that students will end up with a positive attitude about school. P5 expressed a wish to see more growth on a social and emotional level—because, with the population of kids, they probably won't go very far academically. Hence, socialization is very important. The homes appear to be "loud and chaotic," (P5) so the kids don't learn to sit still and focus. By way of illustration, P8 said, "I'm still telling a little girl to sit down." P5 said,

Um, in 4th grade, 5th grade, 6th grade. I mean, I'm amazed. And even jumping back to what I need from parents, more than anything, even if you don't – just teach them like the basic skills of how, how we sit, how we focus, how we listen to somebody by looking at them. ... I mean, I've spent five weeks teaching them how to line up, sit still, raise your hand, and it's going to probably be all year. And they might not still have it next year. And that's so much time wasted.

P6 brought up conditions in society in general, which he described as being at a “weird crossroads” because of the media—like reading things from one’s phone—that does not require an attention span any more. Most of the teachers seemed to find themselves longing for the “old days.”

While discussing how teachers perceive their relationship with their students’ parents, the teachers were very positive about their relationship with the parents they actually meet and expressed a desire that it be strong and communicative. The percentage of parents they see is small, they said, but these parents are very supportive. P3 said, “I love “meet the teacher” night. I love when the parents come in; you get to meet their families. It really—you get to know so much more about the child from meeting their family.” Building on the previous statement, P1 explained, in referring to the home-school connection:

That’s just important. I, that’s why I always did my little play in the beginning of the year because that brought the parents in. And it was non-confrontational. It was something that they wanted to come to see the kids so they came. And then you could make that connection with them. And I think that’s important. I’ve had parents that I’ve talked to that are very defensive. Get very defensive very quickly. And I try to diffuse that and have sometimes ended up having a very nice relationship with that parent. But there are some parents, I think, that automatically are on the defense.... I mean, there have been some parents that you just don’t call anymore.

P1 agreed, mentioning that parents don’t seem to understand that teachers have “good and pure” intentions; she also noted that she thinks parents do not quite understand

the relationship that teachers have with the children. Most of the participants had found that parents could be very defensive, and they agreed that this is more often a problem between female teachers and moms than between male teachers and the parents. There was some speculation that it might be jealousy on the mom's part because of the relationship between the child and the teacher. P1 mentioned that parents do not see their kids very much, so when all they hear is "Mrs. [name] this. Mrs. [name] that. Mrs. this, Mrs. that." You know. And oh, oh – "Mrs. [name] this. Mrs. [name] that," she could understand how they might get a little upset. Most agreed, and P6 said, "Like they're not there for their child and you are. And they know that, so they get on the phone with you, and they're automatically defensive and they start attacking you."

When asked how would teachers like parents to be involved in the child's schooling, participants unanimously stated they would like parents to be supportive, be respectful of the teacher and the school, get their children to school, get them to bed on time—basically, be a good parent. Respect for the teacher and the school seemed to elicit the greatest positive response from the group. This question and the perceived role of the parents seem to overlap, so the participants seemed to realize that their input had already been largely provided in first question. We moved on to our final inquiry, which gave the participants an opportunity to address any other aspects that they would like to address that had not yet been covered.

The teachers mentioned time: time to learn a new curriculum, time to get used to a new grade level, time to communicate with the parents. P5 said:

Yeah, and I think it, I think it just makes a difference in everything because when you're, when you're more confident in what you're teaching, when you know you

have things prepared, you can—I think the kids even know. I think they know when you're calm and everything's good, and they know when you're on edge and even if you try to cover it up. And so it's even trying to cram everything into 35 minutes. Copier is broken and you haven't gotten your manual yet.

P3 added, “You don't have enough desks on the first day of school, and the kids are coming, and you're carrying your own desk to your room.”

Participants expressed wanting more respect from both superiors and kids/parents. They tended to feel that the parents don't always get the last say with regard to things like moving the kids up a grade level. The administration needs to stand up to the parents about such things. The teachers feel that they lack professional integrity because they're driven by the administration and by whatever the government comes up with, as well as by money or the lack thereof. P5 said, “It feels like we're always kind of last on the consideration list, and we have the most important job to do. And the most responsibility.” The teachers expressed discouragement with changing curricula as well as with having to fill in more and more for what parents should be doing at home. P3 said that “if the administration had things in place and they stuck to it, it would make our jobs easier.... But they're ready to attack us. You know, they put us out.” P1 agreed that administration harasses teachers: “New lesson plans and new this and now this... it's just constant, we're just constantly being barraged.”

At the end of the discussion teachers expressed satisfaction with their group discussion and a wish that this kind of group discussion would be accessible to them as an ongoing activity. On my way home, I reflected on my experience with this, my first group interview, and felt embarrassed to think how anxious I was at the beginning of the

group discussion and the difficulties the teachers had in understanding my first question. Then I reflected on how the group discussion continued to unfold through the entire session. I noticed how the teachers were becoming more relaxed and genuine in their input, and then it was not much longer before they become more cohesive, backing each other up in their arguments, often using a good sense of humor with laughter and giggles. I noticed a minimum of deep felt emotions were expressed; rather the discussion was more cognitively oriented. This teacher focus group provided a few significant quotations, organized in Table 2 according to the four lived existentials.

Table 2

Analysis of Teachers' Focus Group Lived Experiences

Analytical Category	Significant Quotations
Four lived existentials	
Lived space (spatiality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know... the one thing I love is the air conditioning. [laughs, multiple P's agree] I think back to when it was 100 degrees and we were dying. • And the square footage is too small for 5th and 6th grade. The amount of kids that we have in there now. There's just no room [unintelligible]. • You don't have enough desks on the first day of school, and the kids are coming, and you're carrying your own desk to your room.
Lived body (corporeality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know... the one thing I love is the air conditioning. [laughs, multiple P's agree] I think back to when it was 100 degrees and we were dying. • And open up the windows and all the bees flew in and wasps flew in. [Then the kids screaming. "Ahh, ahh!"] • Now that kindergarten has moved up into a regular classroom instead of those nice big [rooms]— you know, when I found out I was moving to kindergarten, I thought, "Yippee." • When he told me I was moving, you could have thought I had just lost somebody because I was so like, "Oh my God. You're moving me. No, you're not." "Yeah. I'm moving you to 2nd grade." It's a big adjustment for me. • And I feel sometimes we, we have no integrity. We have no professional integrity. We have no say-so or input. That can be... that can be overwhelming. But they're ready to attack us. You know, they put us out. ... it's just constant, we're just constantly being barraged • I don't think that we're always held as experts. • But they're ready to attack us. You know, they put us out." • But like to feel like you're not even listened to and to feel like your ideas aren't even [valued]
Lived time (temporality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think sometimes our parents are intimidated by homework because maybe they don't understand it. That when they went through the school system, they didn't do it that way. • My daughter had so many different ways to divide or to multiply or whatever that—you know, I wasn't sure how she was being taught, so. [That can be... that can be overwhelming]

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • And repetitious, too. That's how I was taught. Repetitious. Over and over and over again. Our math program is so different. • I think the curriculum changes actually affect the teachers more, which in turn affects the children. I mean, like—things change so quickly that we rarely get a chance to come to grasp with that thing that we were teaching them for a couple years. They change [our assignments or change our (rooms?)]. • Benchmark, proficient. And to like school. And to want to come to school. I think if you like school and you want to come to school, you will show success. It might not be proficient, it might not be benchmark, but you will succeed and feel good about it if you like it, if you like to come. • I wanted to see from them was more social, emotional, kind of growth because for them that's what's going to be the most important because a lot of their, they were going to start topping off 5th or 6th grade as far as what they could do academically. • ... everybody is doing something different, too. There is no continuity in a lot of it. • It's a back and forth battle that we're constantly fighting.
Lived human relations (relationality or communality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The parents that I do get ahold of are for the most part very supportive. • And I think parents get easily intimidated by teachers. I know I just went to a meeting, and it was special ed teacher, regular teacher, head of this Psychology department, and principal. And counselor. I felt like an idiot. • I think they're intimidated by your relationship with their, their son or daughter. Like they're not there for their child and you are. And they know that, [multiple P's agree] so they get on the phone with you, and they're automatically defensive and they start attacking you.
Potential risk factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Well, I didn't do it because my mom was at work. I didn't have nobody to help me." • I think sometimes our parents are intimidated by homework because maybe they don't understand it. That when they went through the school system, they didn't do it that way. They're not sure how to do it. • And then you have those parents that work late. And your child is coming in the classroom, "Well, I didn't do it because my mom was at work. I didn't have nobody to help me." • And I think parents get easily intimidated by teachers. I know I just went to a meeting, and it was special ed teacher, regular

	<p>teacher, head of this psychology department, and principal. And counselor. I felt like an idiot.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have student that I know their moms were 14, 15 years old. • But the one thing about the curriculum that has always bothered me is that the people in the trenches are never consulted. Rarely consulted about curriculum changes. •
4. Potential protective factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So we don't have to feel like we're doing everything. • I love "meet the teacher" night. I love when the parents come in, you get to meet their families. It really, you get to know so much more about the child from meeting their family. • I always did my little play in the beginning of the year because that brought the parents in. And it was non-confrontational. It was something that they wanted to come to see the kids so they came. And then you could make that connection with them • Yeah, it helps us tremendously when we have parents that are involved. To know that we can call and say, "Joey is not doing his homework," or "Joey needs help with place value." And to know that they're also going to provide some extra help. • It is, yeah. It just, especially with the discipline [problems] if you have a parent that backs you up and supports you and carries through with something at home • And I think that, I think that our student population, because they look to school to be something they can rely on as being consistent and routine, so I think when we do make changes, it does affect them a lot.
6. Roles of parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think they're more like the cheerleaders. Like I don't expect them to do the actual teaching, but they need to be the ones providing the motivation... • ...making sure that the kids are doing the at-home work. Yeah, the support system, so. • Just communicating. You know, "How was your day? What did you do?" • Getting them to bed. Making sure they're fed. Making sure they're well-groomed. • Checking their planner. Making sure they're homework's done. Reinforcing what's being taught. Like doing the, going over the homework and everything. • Taking that, a true interest in what they're, what's going on in school? When they come home, "What did you do today? What did you learn? Let me see your homework." And making it as important, making school as important at home as it is.
Systems theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They know her, so they're going to give her more support at

	<p>home because they know her teacher personally.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have students that I know their moms were 14, 15 years old. • ...making sure that the kids are doing the at-home work. Yeah, the support system, so.
Pedagogy of the oppressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you're moved into a new grade, it's kind of—I'm going to lean on that teacher next to me... • Well, the way they communicate is different than the way we communicate. And not that they're unprofessional, but you know, there's just—I think it goes back to, you don't feel intimidated because there's not that barrier there. • But the one thing about the curriculum that has always bothered me is that the people in the trenches are never consulted. Rarely consulted about curriculum changes. • It feels like we're always kind of last on the consideration list, and we have the most important job to do. And the most responsibility.

Teacher Key Informant Interviews

The eight teacher participants work at the urban elementary school at which I chose to conduct the study. The interview meetings were scheduled to meet after school was dismissed. The interviews were conducted in the elementary school building in a private, quiet, confidential space, in which the participants could feel free to speak while being immersed in the milieu of the phenomenon to be explored. I reviewed the consent to participate (see Appendix J) and reminded the participants that the audio and video recordings will be destroyed at the end of the study process. This time I felt more confident, my English as a second language was not an issue, and I took my time and calmly proceeded to present my first inquiry item. I informed the participants that I would be asking the same questions presented during the group interviews and that the reason for the individual interview was to provide a more exclusive setting for examining the topics of the study more deeply. The establishment of a more conversational

interaction also served to reduce my own apprehension and made the questioning feel more natural. The interview lasted 45 minutes at which time the topics at hand appeared to be exhausted. A specific induction protocol was used that includes an explanation of the key informant interview process. Following is a narrative of the questions posed to the teachers during the key informant interview.

Teacher Key Informant 1 (TKI1). TKI1 is an African-American female “veteran teacher” who has been teaching primary grades at the elementary school for more than 21 years, the first 18 of which she taught first grade. She previously taught in California and in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in a private educational setting.

We first discussed how she perceives the parents’ role in their children’s education. She began with a kind of indirect answer—that it should be pretty easy for a parent to look into a child’s book bag, but that many parents don’t seem to do that, and the child has to come back and say, “Miss [name], my mom, or my dad, was too busy to sign”; or “They had somewhere to go,” or “It was too late and they had to go to bed.” She feels it’s the parents’ first responsibility—to look in the child’s book bag and see what has to be completed for homework. “Parents need to take greater responsibility to see that their kids get the homework done.” At this point I felt nervous and confused because had the feeling that my question had not been understood. I also wanted by all means to avoid guiding the question or to rephrase my questions using different words. After I had reworded the question a little, being careful not to change the meaning, and queried as to what she believes parents should be doing, she said,

They should look in their child’s book bag. I know the child should be responsible enough to do their homework; however, I believe that a parent should

look behind their children as far as looking in their book bag, asking questions at the dinner table, “How was school? Do you have homework?” I believe in that. And apparently, that’s not happening with our children. And as long as I’ve been teaching, there are children coming to school, asking, “Can I do my homework right now because I didn’t get a chance to do it at home?” But I think the parent should be more responsible with their child.

She then emphasized again that she felt parents should be more responsible with their children, noting that students’ homework is a “worry” for teachers since homework is part of the students’ grades. She said that less than 50% of parents sign their children homework. One of the themes discussed was worry: “I believe teachers are very... they worry about their children, as far as homework. And it’s part of their grade in some classes. Now I’ll check homework as part of the grade.”

When we turned to discussing the effect of the school’s remodeling project and frequent curriculum changes on students’ academic behavior, TKF1 was quite negative about the curriculum changes. She had been changed to a new grade this year as a veteran teacher and was noting that learning a new curriculum is quite hard. She also does not think that learning is as much fun for the kids any more. The new curriculum, which is geared toward preparing for tests, is a lot of work for both teachers and students. As TKF1 talked about the new curriculum demands, one of the themes discussed was preparation:

You’re not having the fun that you used to have. Now we’re talking about the PSSA’s and preparing our children. I understand that. But it’s a whole lot of work. It’s a lot of work for each class now. It’s not like it used to be....Well,

being that I'm a veteran teacher, and I got moved to a different grade this year, it's—as far as the curriculum, I'm trying to keep up with the curriculum because I have to learn a whole new curriculum. And for the students, it all depends how, how the teacher – it all depends on how the teacher teaches. It could be demanding. It could be... it all depends on the teacher....And I want them to be successful. Successful in anything they desire.

In terms of the building remodel, the air conditioning is good, she said, calmly and with a laugh:

For years, we used to sweat. I was up on the third floor, we used to sweat, OK. Now it's much better as far as the atmosphere, as far as being a lot cooler when it's very, very hot. You have your own gauge, your own temperature gauge in the classroom. Whether you want it warmer or you want it cooler, you know. You have that.

Nonetheless, the rooms are much smaller, and she particularly thinks the cafeteria is lacking in architectural design.

The classrooms are much smaller, to me. Much, much smaller. To do anything. ... Our building is much smaller. Like our cafeteria size. It, it's just different. I think they should've thought about the blueprints more. And could've had just more room. More room and different classes. For their own personal space and mine. Because I tell my children all the time, "Um, this is my box. This is your box. OK. Move back. This is personal space. I need my personal space." And they understand that. So I just wish we had a little bit more room.

In discussing what TK11 felt she needs from the parents to help children be successful with their schooling, she indicated that communication is the key! She likes the planners that both parents and teachers sign as she thinks this helps with communication between parents and teachers.

I'm very, very happy that I have planners that we can sign off and on with the parents signing and the teachers signing. That's a good communicator—the planners. That's every night. I sign them off every night. The children, they also write in their planners. They put in their homework, what I expected from them. And the parents have to sign it daily. So if they don't have a phone, they can at least write to me and let me know. If they changed their number, their address, you can put it right in the planner. Any questions or concerns that they have, put it right in the planner. ...Whether it's good behavior or bad behavior. I'll put both in. [laughs]. I believe in commitment. Work with your child. Work with your child so that they can become successful. Commitment and communication is the key.

We next addressed what hopes TK11 might have for her students. She stated she wants her students to be successful, to be able to read and to write. She wants them to learn while they're in her room. She talks to them about what they want to do when they grow up and about having a dream for themselves. She tells them that she dreamed of teaching and that she held onto her dream all those years, 30 years. When she taught first grade for many years, she would see certain things in her students and would tell them they were going to be an artist or a nurse...and sometimes they have turned out that way. She sees them on Facebook. Some of them still keep in touch with her.

I asked TK11 about her relationship with the students' parents. She indicated having a very good rapport with 80% of the parents. Because she was moved from kindergarten to 2nd grade, she knows a lot of the parents. Two of the parents volunteer because they want to know what their children are doing in school. She sends out a monthly newsletter to the parents so they will be kept up to date. She was only positive about her relationship with the parents. She does not find it difficult to establish good relationships with the parents. She said:

I feel that if I know about my parents, I'll know about my kid. My student. And I'll know why different things happen the way that they do in the child's life.

Some of my children, when they come to school, sometimes they don't have a good morning. They don't have a good day.

She also tells the children that if they need to talk about anything, they can come up to her desk before school starts in the morning. She wants to know what's going on because there will be behavioral issues if the parents aren't together. She said,

And that's a big difference because you're, you're going to have a child that's going to lash out. Whether it's being disobedient or just lashing out with other children. You're going to have different behaviors. I know that for a fact. I went through it as a single mother.

She begins developing a relationship with the parents in the very beginning at parent orientation, and then she gives her cell phone number out and says "call me any time." She stressed that she starts developing the relationship at the very beginning of the year. She noted that one has to be sensitive—parents might take offense. She cited one time that she tried to give a child some clothing and the mother was offended. She said, "I

guess she just was too proud. I knew what the child had. I wanted to help. But that backfired.” She stressed how important it is for the teacher and parents to be on the “same page.”

When we explored how TKI1 would like parents to be involved in their children’s schooling, she noted that parents could use technology to look up their kids’ grades online. Parents just need to stay tuned—it’s very simple.

One simple number, click it. “Let me see what my child’s doing in math. Let me see what my child is doing in reading. Hmm. Maybe I work too much and can’t get to the teacher. Let me click this computer and see what’s going on.” Just stay tuned. You have the necessities. You have everything there for you. Stay tuned.

It’s just that simple. Technology has changed so much, you can do anything now. She would like to see parents be more involved, but she knows they try. She also thinks communication is better than it used to be. The kids are happier when the communication is better. She further explained:

They want to try to do their best. They try very hard. When a child is happy, when a child is full, when a child have rest, that’s—you can get success from a child. You’re not going to get success if you have a child that’s coming in that’s hungry, that’s tired, that’s been up all night. Wondering where their next meal’s coming from. I’ve been there. I’ve seen it all. But it’s much better when they’re coming in when they’re smiling. When my kids come in and say, “Miss [name], I didn’t eat. I’m hungry. I didn’t eat break—” go to breakfast. That’s the most important meal. Go to breakfast.

The final question provided TKI1 with an opportunity to address any other aspect that had not yet been covered. TKI1 then mentioned that better communication is needed between administrators and teachers. Administrators need to listen to the teachers, to what they want and need. “It’s always do, do, do.” Administrators need to communicate earlier, let the teachers know what’s coming in advance. She referenced the change in curriculum again and how much work there is to do and brought up that she teaches from experience. Thus, probably her teaching style isn’t going to change very much because she teaches from experience; she is soft-spoken with her kids and tries to find out what’s going on in their minds. She uses an illustration of how she learned to ride a bike by way of modeling for them:

I said, “Let me tell you what I did when I learned how to ride a bike,” and I told them how many times I fell down and scraped up my knees, got myself back up and was very determined. Kept scraping my knees and saying, “I’m going to do this again. I don’t care how many times I scrape up my knee. I’m going to get back up on this bike, and I’m going to ride this bike.” It took me all evening to learn how to ride that bike because I had a neighbor next door that taught me. And we lived in an alley. And he would hold onto the bike when I got on it, and he would say, “I got you, I got you.” And I’m going down the hill, and all of a sudden, his voice gets faded, and I get scared because he’s not behind me anymore. And I would have this fear, and I would say to myself, “No, it’s not going to bother me. I’m going to stay on this bike, and I’m going to learn how to ride this bike, and I’m going to be determined. I don’t care how many times I’ll fall.” And I would tell my kids that. I told them, I said, “When it was time for me

to turn around. Bam! I fell. Got back up, brushed my knees off again.” I did that at least 50 times, I told them. I said my knees were scraped up. And I know little girls are not supposed to have scraped up knees but I was, I scraped them up.

Because I was so determined to ride that bike. Do you know, two days later, two of my kids came to me and said, “Miss [name], guess what? I learned how to ride a bike.” [laughs]

The conversation ended with an observation about how important it is to model behavior to kids.

Table 3

Analysis of Individual Interview: Teacher Key Informant 1

Analytical Category	Significant Quotations
Four lived existentials	
Lived space (spatiality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My door is always open. I tell my parents, “Come in anytime. Sit and watch what we do in our class. • The classrooms are not as big. The good thing about it is the air conditioning now. For years, we used to sweat. [laughs] I was up on the third floor, we used to sweat, OK. Now it’s much better as far as the atmosphere, as far as being a lot cooler when it’s very, very hot. • Mmm... our building is much smaller. Like our cafeteria size. It, it’s just different. I think they should’ve thought about the blueprints more. And could’ve had just more room. More room and different classes. For their own personal space and mine.
Lived body (corporeality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We used to sweat, OK. Now it’s much better as far as the atmosphere, as far as being a lot cooler when it’s very, very hot. • Kids come in and say, “Miss [name], I didn’t eat. I’m hungry. I didn’t eat break—” • You’re, you’re going to have a child that’s going to lash out.
Lived time (temporality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I had a very good rapport with my parents two years ago. And I have a very good rapport with them now. • Sometimes I like a surprise. You don’t have to tell me when you’re coming in all the time. Just pop in. See what your child is doing. • You’re not having the fun that you used to have
Lived human relation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I’ve developed good relationships with my parents up to now.
Potential risk factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Miss [name], my mom, or my dad, was too busy to sign.” Or “They had somewhere to go,” or “It was too late and they had to go to bed.” • Can I do my homework right now because I didn’t get a chance to do it at home?” • Mmm... our building is much smaller. Like our cafeteria size. It, it’s just different. I think they should’ve thought about the blueprints more. And could’ve had just more room. More room and different classes. For their own personal space and mine. • I gave one of my girls a coat. And a mother was very upset

	<p>with me. And I thought I was helping, but I was damaging the relationship that I had with the mother. Because she was, I guess she just was too proud.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's a lot of work that we have to do. And we're finding out, what, two days, or three days later that we have to do something.
Potential protective factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So they're going to do their best. Because they know I have a good relationship with their mother or their father. • Communication is the key. You have to communicate. I'm very, very happy that I have planners that we can sign off and on with the parents signing and the teachers signing.
Roles of parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's pretty simple for the parent to sign homework. To go through a child's book bag. • Parents should look behind their children as far as looking in their book bag, asking questions at the dinner table, "How was school? Do you have homework?" • Communication is the key. You have to communicate. I'm very, very happy that I have planners that we can sign off and on with the parents signing and the teachers signing.
System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There's a lot of parents that are not together. Living together.
Pedagogy of the oppressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm trying to keep up with the curriculum because I have to learn a whole new curriculum. • Now we're talking about the PSSAs and preparing our children. It's not just writing up your lesson plans. You must do them online. • I feel that if I know about my parents, I'll know about my kid. My student. And I'll know why different things happen the way that they do in the child's life. • It's a lot of work that we have to do. And we're finding out, what, two days, or three days later that we have to do something.

Teacher Key Informant 2 (TKI2). TKI2 is a Caucasian female, who has been teaching at the elementary school for more than 21 years. She preferred meeting in her classroom, a private area, after school was dismissed. We started right on time; I reviewed the consent to participate and to audio and video recording. I provided an opportunity for participant to address any concerns and then proceeded to the interview.

In answer to the first question about how she perceives the parents' role in their children's education, TKI2 said that she sees the parents' role as vital—not that she expects them to teach, but to provide a support structure. The children need to understand that school is important to the parents.

As a parent myself, I found that my job was to make sure that my daughter was fed properly, had enough sleep, proper hygiene, got up in time, was ready for school, came to school prepared. And she knew that her father and I both felt that education was important.

It's crucial for the parents to talk to the child about school—ask them what they learned, etc. They don't have to tutor them—just be positive about school.

With regard to the question about remodeling and curriculum changes, TKI2 said that she didn't really think there was a problem with the remodeling itself, even though it was inconvenient to have the noise sometimes. The biggest change was adding the 5th and 6th grades to the building, which did change the dynamic. The older kids do not necessarily set a good example for the younger kids. She said,

And I think that the younger students pick up on that quickly. And it, it made for a less respectful environment, I thought. I think. You know, the kids acted out more. They tried to be cool, you know, like their older cousins or older siblings. They didn't—I don't think there was the respect and the ... consideration. The remodeling, so far as technology goes, was wonderful. She likes the smart boards. However, she emphasized that she's old school and that kids really just need the basics.

As we explored what TKI2 needs from the parents to help the children be successful with their schooling, she indicated that support and communication are the

most important. “Communication is the key.” She described herself as having had good rapport with her students’ parents over the years and thinks that parents need to feel welcomed at the school. She thinks parents need to be invited to the school in non-threatening ways, like to a kid’s play where cookies are served. She thinks it’s important for teachers to try to minimize parents’ fears. She encourages parents to do homework with the kids, not just make sure they do it, and she encourages them to call her if they have any questions. It’s a kind of teamwork—there are 26 students, and she can’t see every little thing, so she needs the parents’ cooperation:

It’s very important for educators to try and minimize any anxiety or fear that parents have as far as education is concerned. A lot of parents didn’t do well in school or perhaps didn’t like school. And so they don’t even want to come to school. So when they do come in a non-threatening atmosphere, like to see a play, to see their child in a play, or meet the teacher. You know, something—we’re not talking about grades or behavior. We’re just meeting them and making a connection with them. And I always try to encourage my parents to do homework with their children, but I let them know that the homework is just a review of what I’ve taught in school. So if their child was paying attention, then they should know how to do their homework by themselves, but the parents need to make sure that they did their homework and go over it. Not just make sure that they did it, but they actually need to go over it, also.

TKI2 spoke about her approach to eliminate parents’ fear: she explains to them that there may be homework that they don’t understand—especially math homework because the math curriculum changes so much, and perhaps the way they learned how to do

something in math may be different than how math is being taught to their children nowadays; thus it can be very intimidating:

I know it was for me as a parent. My daughter would come home with different math problems that I knew how to do, but no, no, no, I had to do it the way she was being taught. And I had no idea. And so as a parent, I would write a note to the teacher. “I’m so sorry. I don’t understand how to do this, and I’m not sure [name], my daughter, really understood it in class. Could you go over it again? And do I need to call? Or should you call—or if you feel the need to, call me.”

And I tell my parents that—“If you don’t understand how to do the homework, let me know. Or write a note on there that you just weren’t, that you were unsure.

And if you’re, if you feel that your child is still unsure, let me know that, too. And then I can, I can help out that way.” I think that eases a lot of anxiety.

TKI2 elaborates further, explaining how her approach helps to promote a friendly, open rapport with the parents and prevents parents from thinking that “the only time that teacher calls me is when my son or daughter has done something wrong.”

As we explored TKI2’s hopes for her students’ schooling, she stated that she wants her students to improve and to like school. Proficiency in everything is not expected. She wants them to feel safe and happy and comfortable. If they want to come back, their desire will help to create a successful atmosphere, and they will succeed, then. She said, “If the students are provided with a safe, happy atmosphere, they will want to come and the more they come to school, the more they will learn.”

When we explored how TKI2 perceives her relationship with her students’ parents, she was quite positive about it. She doesn’t hesitate to call parents, and when she

does, she starts out by talking about something positive, not with the problem. She tries to find out if the parents have seen anything that concerns them at home and then asks for ideas about how to handle it, rather than putting the parents on the defensive immediately by notifying them that there's a problem. The teacher then disclosed that besides her experience teaching, she had taught classes in banks on customer relations, so she knew quite a bit about handling people. Then, before she began teaching, she was a paraprofessional for five years and was thus able to observe other teachers and to learn a lot from them. She also had a chance to learn the curriculum in this way, as well as the dynamics of the community. She said:

I start off with something positive, and then I bring in what the concern is. And I just think, again, that puts them on a, an even level. They don't become defensive. They're more open to listen to you and then, as you, and when you phrase it, it is a concern as to it's a real problem. "And I'm having a real problem with your child." That just, I think automatically, that would set me on the defense. But to hear that they're concerned about something and then talking about it. "Do you notice this at home? Have you, have you come across this with Johnny at home? What are some things that you do? Do you have any suggestions for me, how I could handle it in the classroom? This is what I've been doing; do you have any other suggestions? And how can we work on this together to, to eliminate this concern?"

When asked how she would like parents to be involved in their children's schooling, TKI2 mentioned homework, as every teacher will. However, she also mentioned that parents just need to get their children to school. The parents need to make

school important at home. They need to make sure the children get their sleep, get fed, get their homework done:

Making sure that they're getting a good night sleep. That a little brother or a little sister or a sibling isn't keeping them up all night. Or making sure that they're not just falling asleep on the couch, by the TV. I've had students in the past that tell me that they're up all night, and then they fall asleep during school. And they're tired, and they can't help it. They can't help but fall asleep. But I'm always trying to wake them up because I don't want them to miss their education.

In answering the final inquiry, wherein she was asked if there were any other aspects she would like to address, TKI2 observed that she had never really answered the question about the curriculum changes. She thinks the curriculum changes are harmful; she characterized herself as “old school” and said that the emphasis on “higher order” thinking is misplaced in kindergarteners through 2nd graders because they need the basics. She feels the district allows things to happen that they shouldn't because of money, and she feels that a lot is driven by money. Public education has become very political—she used “No Child Left Behind” as an example of something ridiculous. It's just a money maker and had no chance of making every child proficient by 2014; she implied that it can't be done. When a new politician is elected, the program is thrown out and a new one adopted while no one ever asks the teachers what would be good to do. “Politics and money have become the ruination of education.”

She mentioned that there are professions that she thinks are callings rather than just jobs—ministers, psychologists, nurses, doctors, and teachers. However, with the emphasis on money, education gets turned into a business, and the teachers end up doing

a lot of paperwork and taking classes that do not make them into better teachers.

Politicians are not in the classroom, and they don't have a clue. Educators are becoming tired and frustrated, "jaded and exhausted."

They can't really do the job that they're called to do. Because we're being forced to do so many other things in the name of education. But it's, it's politically and monetarily driven. And so I, I just, it makes me sad. I just feel like we're shooting ourselves in the foot, you know, but I'm just old school, I guess.

She ended by saying that she thinks the staff is excellent at the school. They try to do what is best for the students, but they're up against the administration, and the parents also have the final say about whether or not to advance their children to the next grade. So then she ends up feeling ignored, as if she's not the professional—teachers get their integrity taken away from them. And then the administration backs the parents sometimes instead of the teachers. She said, "It's very frustrating. It's very, very frustrating. And it's – it's sad." In addition, she feels there's really no point in complaining about it because it's this way in any job.

Table 4

Analysis of Individual Interview: Teacher Key Informant 2

Analytical Categories	Significant Quotations
Four lived existentials	
Lived space (spatiality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ...with remodeling – I really didn't think there was a problem, at least at the time when I was teaching when there was remodeling. I thought we were able to keep things pretty status quo as far as the kids still knew to come in and we still taught as normal. It was a little noisier at times, and that of course made it a little difficult if there was hammering or pounding. • I think 5th and 6th grade is a little more carefree as far as their behavior in the hallway. And I'm not so sure that they set a really good example for the younger students. And I think that the younger students pick up on that quickly. And it, it made for a less respectful environment, I thought.
Lived body (corporeality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • And so I, I just, it makes me sad. I just feel like we're shooting ourselves in the foot, you know, but. I'm just old school, I guess.
Lived time (temporality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From where they are when they walk in the door on the first day to when they walk out on the last day, I hope that there has been improvement.
Lived human relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We're just meeting them and making a connection with them. • I feel that over the years I have had a pretty good rapport with my, my parents.
Potential risk factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ...bringing 5th and 6th grade down to K through 4 school. To me, it changed the whole dynamic of the school. And it changed the dynamic of the students' behavior. I think 5th and 6th grade is a little more carefree as far as their behavior in the hallway. And I'm not so sure that they set a really good example for the younger students. And I think that the younger students pick up on that quickly. And it, it made for a less respectful environment, I thought. • I have students that are always late. Or miss a lot of school. They fall asleep during school. And they're tired, and they can't help it. They can't help but fall asleep. • I'm the one, I'm the teacher. I'm telling you, your child's

	not ready to move on....
Potential protective factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I really enjoyed when it was just K through 4. I thought^t it was a better atmosphere, especially for the younger kids. • I used to always do a play in the beginning of the year, and the kids all had a part, and the parents all came in. They feel comfortable in school. They enjoy school. They like their teacher. They feel safe. I think if we provide a safe, happy atmosphere, they will want to come.
Roles of parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think the parents' role is critical in the success of their child's education. And when I say that, I don't mean that I expect them to do the teaching, but I do expect them to make education important at home. So reading to your child or even letting them know how important school is and how they want them to go to school and to learn, to respect the teacher, to respect their peers. • I think parents supporting is making sure that they get enough sleep, they're fed, that they're at school. And then doing homework. But you know, making school important at home. • And I, I think I try – and I think it's very important for educators to try and minimize any anxiety or fear that parents have as far as education is concerned. A lot of parents didn't do well in school or perhaps didn't like school. • Our curriculum in math changes. How they learned how to do something in math may be different than how we're teaching our children today to do something, and it's very intimidating.
Systems theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We're telling a parent that their child is struggling and that they, they're not making the grade so to speak, and that you really feel that another year would really benefit them, and the parent has the final say.
Pedagogy of the oppressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I felt that I have little to no integrity as an educator, as far as determining what I feel our students need. • But the one thing about curriculum that has always bothered me is that the people in the trenches are never consulted. Rarely consulted about curriculum changes.

Teacher Key Informant #3 (TKI3). TKI3 is a Caucasian male, who has been teaching at this urban school district for more than 9 years and at the elementary school for the past 3 years. The meeting took place in the participant's classroom, a private

setting, after school was dismissed. We promptly started our interview, in which I first reviewed the consent to participate and to audio and video recording, and provided the opportunity for TKI3 to raise any concerns.

With regard to the parents' role in their children's education, TKI3 had two words: "motivators and enforcers." Parents should have a positive attitude about school, make sure the children get there on time and are prepared. He also spoke of parents as "cheerleaders." He said, "I want them to motivate their children to want to learn and enforce some simple rules so that they, they actually get their school work done."

When I engaged TKI3 in exploring the effect of the school's remodeling and frequent curriculum changes on students' behavior and academics, he was positive about the building changes—he found it pleasant and more conducive to academics. The curriculum changes, however, are not conducive at all. The teachers were not trained at all ahead of time. The district tends to be reactive rather than proactive—it trains the teachers after the fact. He said, "It's kind of giving a 10-year-old keys to a Cadillac before you teach him how to drive."

In terms of what he needs from the parents to help their children be successful at school, TKI3 said that the parents need to motivate their children and encourage them. Some parents have had bad experiences in the school district, so they kind of project their attitudes onto their children. He doesn't feel that he's asking the parents for much—just basic kinds of support. He said, "I just want them to, let their children know how important education is and set up some basic rules for them to follow to make sure that they're doing their work and studying and those types of things."

TKI3's hope for his students' schooling is that they will enjoy school and that it will be a positive experience for them. He noted that with the backgrounds they come from, a lot of the discipline comes in the form of being yelled at, so they tend to tune it out. He would like for the students to continue their education, so he uses money as a motivator—shows them the link between occupations and income, because they do seem to want money. Mainly, though, he emphasized the happiness and enjoyment of the activities.

As we engaged in exploring how TKI3 perceives his relationship with his students' parents, he said that he feels that he coaches parents a lot and helps them to be involved in their kids' schooling. If he has to make a phone call, he starts on a positive note. He also tries to be a motivator for the parents.

I do feel like I'm kind of a coach for them a lot of times in that respect. And a motivator, too. Like, "You're doing a great job. Keep doing what you're doing. Your child comes to school prepared." When that does happen, I want the parents to know that. Because I don't think they hear that as much as, as they would like. So we do have a lot of parents that try very hard. And maybe don't know that what they're doing is working. So I, I guess a coach would be a good way to describe my role.

When quizzed about what produces a good relationship with the parents, he said he didn't really know—said it was maybe personality and the fact that he tries to be positive with the parents and create hands-on activities for the children—thus the children leave his room happy.

TKI3 said he would like parents to be involved in their children's schooling at home, not at school—ask the kids to show them what they did at school and what they have for homework. He sees kids throw their papers away when he passes them back, even if the grades are good, which tells him that the parents aren't very involved. He would like to see praise from the parents when the kids do something good and discipline when they do something bad. He said he would like parents

to praise them when they do something well. To discipline them when they do something bad. I don't think there's enough of that praise going on. Otherwise, I don't think I would have so many kids that don't want to bring A's home. So, I think that's what I would like them to do more of.

Finally, in exploring other aspects that had not yet been covered, TKI3 mentioned that some of the parents are very young themselves, so he ends up talking to the grandparents a lot, who are still responsible and have a work ethic. That generation is fast going away, though, so he worries about what is coming when it's gone and even the grandparents aren't responsible any more. He said,

I'm worried about our next generation. A lot. Because it seems like we have younger parents that are pushing their kids off onto their parents. But the next generation, they're not going to have responsible parents to push them off onto. I don't know. I see that as a problem.

Table 5

Analysis of Individual Interview: Teacher Key Informant 3

Analytical Category	Significant Quotations
Four lived existentials	
Lived space (spatiality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The remodeling, now that the building's done, I definitely think it's more conducive to academics. It's just the brighter building. It looks nicer. I think it's more welcoming than it was in the past. At least coming from the middle school to here. The middle school was very sterile, the environment there. This was a lot more colorful. Now the building may have been like that prior, I just didn't spend a lot of time in the elementary building. But I think it's more conducive to academics.
Lived body (corporeality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I'm worried about our next generation. A lot. Because it seems like we have younger parents that are pushing their kids off onto their parents. But the next generation, they're not going to have responsible parents to push them off onto. I don't know. I see that as a problem.
Lived time (temporality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I want them to be happy with their education and enjoy the activities that we're doing.
Lived human relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I've always had good relationships with the parents. I feel like I'm a coach a lot. Like I'm coaching the parents and giving them the encouragement and tips on how to help their students out.
Potential risk factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I still have a lot of kids that when I pass papers back, even if they have good grades, they throw them in the garbage.
Potential protective factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To praise them when they do something well. To discipline them when they do something bad.
Roles of parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I guess two words: I see them as motivators and enforcers. They need to motivate their children to get to school on time, to be prepared. They have to kind of be cheerleaders for them, to let them know that, that they value education. Enforcer, I guess I mean that because they need to set up some rules or guidelines for the student, for their children to follow.
Systems theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have a lot of students that are being raised by their grandparents
Pedagogy of the oppressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A lot of the things that we're asked to do. We're asked to do them without the proper training.

Parent Focus Group Interview

The following is a narrative presentation of the parents' focus group and key informant interviews. Specific induction protocols were used, including an explanation of the focus group interview process. Semi-structured questions were posed to the parents, of whom there were nine, during this interview. One of them, participant #2, has a very soft voice and was not feeling well; and another one, participant #9, arrived late to the interview.

The Parent Focus Group interview was initially scheduled September 26, 2013, at 5:00 p.m. Nine participants had agreed to participate, but on that day, only four parents showed, two of whom were on time and two of whom arrived later and needed to leave early. Thus participants requested re-scheduling for October 3, 2013, at 5:00 p.m. This gave me the opportunity to contact the other members that had reported experiencing last-minute difficulties, some with work schedules and others with after-school child care and needing to take their children after school sport activities. Recruiting parents to participate in this study was difficult and anxiety driven. I did not know what to expect, and I found myself constantly worried about whether the participants would show up or not. On October 3rd I got a nice surprise when eight of the participants showed up right on time. The ninth participant could not make it but sent her husband without previous warning. This last participant arrived at the focus group meeting at the end of the session, right when the group moved to discuss the last inquiry.

The focus group meeting took place right after school was dismissed at 3:30 p.m. I set up recording equipment to make sure the room was arranged in a manner conducive to recording an engaging discussion. When the participants arrived they appeared to be in

a good mood and in a disposition for our discussion; they showed no discomfort about the audio or video recording. Thus, I felt more confident than I felt during my first group interview the teachers.

I had previously given the participants consent-to-participate forms to sign; however, I had not noticed that the Duquesne University IRB signature was missing. I explained the situation to them, and I reviewed the form with them again to ensure that the participants had an understanding of the study and of their rights as participants; then had them re-sign a new form that had the appropriate Duquesne Signature. During the review of the consent form, I reviewed the voluntary nature of participation, the confidential nature of their participation, and confidentiality in group settings. Participants were identified as P1, P2, P3 etc., but were allowed to use their first names during the meeting to avoid confusion. They were assured that no names would appear in the transcribed document. We then began the audio and video recording of our discussion.

I presented the first inquiry regarding whether their children had any problems adjusting to elementary school. Most of the parents were positive in their responses, indicating that the children had few or no problems and that they were liking it. P1 said,

Yeah, my daughter, when she did attend [someone coughs, unintelligible] it was seamless, there wasn't any issues. Initially my son had some problems when he first came to the elementary school, but through testing and evaluations, they, they had decided that he was struggling because he was on the spectrum, Autism spectrum. But once that was, that diagnosis came in and intervention took place. I didn't have a problem at that point.

Two of the parents attributed the smooth transition to help from Head Start, or at least indicated that as a possibility. P6 said, “My kids adjusted really well, also. I don’t have any problems with them. They enjoy coming here. They enjoy hanging out with their friends.”

We transitioned to our next question concerning how parents felt about the curriculum changes. The elementary school was originally built in 1930 as a three-story brick structure that housed 10 rooms. In 1954, the school was renovated with a seven-room, two-story brick structure to the south and a small gymnasium to the north. In 1978, the original gymnasium was removed and a three-story concrete panel wing was built, a three-story brick structure, and a new gym was added. In 2008, the three-story brick structure was showing signs of serious wear, whereupon a major physical renovation was done: a kitchen was added to the two-story 1954 annex, and the gym was expanded. All this happened after the system Board of Directors decided to realign the grades in the current schools. Before undergoing remodeling, the elementary building was smaller, having housed only kindergarten through fourth-grade students; but after remodeling, the building became a K-6.

When we transitioned to discussing how the remodeling and curriculum changes affect their children’s behavior and academics, this question provoked an argument with obvious deep felt emotions. For these parents, lived space experience seemed not to be very significant. Participant #6, for example, responded to the question about school remodeling, dismissing it as not very significant. The other parents seemed to concur because no one mentioned it again. However, as they discussed the physical lived body, lived time, and lived relations, their opinions about their experiences in dealing with

these situations were strong and overwhelmingly negative about the curriculum changes. The parents began by discussing the reading curriculum, which they agreed was getting worse results than the old curriculum. P8 said, “My kids were in the middle of the change, my oldest ones, and they had a really hard time adjusting to the reading after we changed it into the new reading program.” The discussion switched quickly from the children’s progress to how difficult it is for the parents to help the children at home. P4 said, “But it’s also hard for the new curriculum to adjust at home for the parents with the homework with the kids.” It seems that all the parents are involved with attempting to help their children at home and that they take it very seriously. Nonetheless, they characterized it as “confusing,” “a nightmare,” and “torture.”

With an amazing sense of humor, participants engaged in a heated argument regarding math, the way it is taught and the parents’ frustration in trying to help their children. Many group members shared their frustration, including P1, who said, “It’s a nightmare. It’s a struggle.” Many of the participants agreed with this statement, and P3 commented,

“I’ve written notes. You know, ‘I don’t know what this is. I’m sorry.’” She continued, “We’re not trying to get out of it, but you know what I finally discovered, the home links? That’s the answer key.... I was so stressed out about it. And no, every day I was sweating bullets. I’m like, ‘What are they bringing’—like who in 2nd grade is starting to learn about geometry? ... And they’re skipping, and I hate it that they, they wouldn’t focus on just the basic fundamentals of like math.”

Participants compared the way they learned math to the way their children are being taught math and acknowledged the need for memorization and repetition. P3 also said,

Because they're going all around in circles instead of just teaching them how to divide. And then you can go and teach them easier, faster ways, but don't, you know, don't do that. You're not helping us. And I don't think it's preparing....

We just, at home, I said, "Listen, this is what we're about to do." And I have to sit down with them, and we work over the summer, but when they finally caught on we were doing something, like I cringe every day that they come home and it's something new. I'm like, "You're in 5th grade. Why are we doing this? What is this?"

P1 said, "It's, it's very stressful because it's difficult as a parent when you don't feel like you can help your child. And it's bad when you really aren't smarter than a 5th grader."

P3 again commented:

I, yeah. I torture myself. And then I finally, I finally said maybe I should just stop and look at it and I realized, "Oh you dummy, it's the answer key." [laughs] But it's still, I still hate it. I don't even know what a rainbow array is. I'm like, "What is this?" My daughter's like, "Oh it's easy." I said, "Can you show me?" She said, "Don't worry, I'll just do it." But I just, I want to learn. "Can you show me?" I'll get it if you explain to me.

Even as most of the parents heartily agreed that they found it difficult to help their children with math, some raised the issue of difficulties in helping their children even with the language arts. P6 said:

You know, even with the language arts. I remember when [name] was doing like a series of things. And you do, one, two – one, comma, two, comma – and they said that you didn't have to put that comma in front of "and." I learned you did. You know, that comma had to be in front of "and." So I don't know which way is right. Did the rule change?

All the participants agreed with laughter. Though they were laughing about their difficulties with the comma, P3 ended this part of the discussion by saying, "And I can't say I enjoy it. I don't know. It's just, this is, it's torture. Oh, this is a lot."

When the participants were asked what they need from their children's school in order to help them be successful in school, P6 responded immediately that more communication would be helpful. In the discussion that followed, it emerged that some teachers are more helpful than others. They seemed to like that one teacher automatically texts the parents each day with the homework that has been assigned to the kids. "It's not like it's her, it's not like her personal phone. You just type in like @[name] and then at 3:30 every day, I get a text message whether or not she has homework." The parents agreed that it would be good if all the teachers used a system like that.

One parent then noted that the lack of communication might come from the administrators rather than the teachers:

I don't think it's so much teachers. The teachers are good at communication. I think it's more administration. The higher-ups. I think there's a gap somewhere there between administration and teachers. I think the teachers try to do what they're supposed to do, but at some points, they're, "Well, we can't do that." You know. I think it's more of an administration problem, not the teachers. All the

teachers I've had through this have always been wonderful. I love, well, I know them all because I work in the cafeteria, but I like all the teachers here. There's not one I can't say a bad thing about.

These comments sparked a general discussion on administrators. Here, the parents seemed unanimous in asserting that some of the administrators (not all) were not good communicators and that the atmosphere established at the school can seem unfriendly and unwelcoming. P6 commented, "We used to get letters of, like updates of things – there was at one time a calendar that they used to send home every day. All that has been eliminated."

P1, who introduced the issue of the unfriendly and unwelcoming atmosphere, said, "I just don't feel it's a welcoming environment for everyone. Everyone doesn't necessarily feel welcome. And that starts from when you walk in the door."

Participants unanimously agreed that this lack of a welcoming atmosphere can be an issue for some parents, especially some parents who are intimidated merely by the school setting, based on previous experience. In particular, they agreed that parents are often made to feel as if they are "a bother." P7 said:

I'm a new employee here. I've been a parent for years. My daughter is in 5th grade, and I just started working here. And I know exactly what you mean. You walk into the office, you expect to be welcomed and greeted, and sometimes they don't even look up from what they're doing.

Interestingly, P6 then brought up (seemingly out of the blue) that the award assemblies had been abolished, and there was widespread agreement that these needed to be brought back, as they had observed positive reinforcement working well with the kids. P4 said,

“The kids need that positive reinforcement. And the adults need to see their kids happy and be a part of them and their successes.”

P8 noted that the school had recently implemented a positive behavior award system and P5 shared her success in using this reward system:

I had the worstest bus and no aide would ride it. They could not find anybody to get on that bus. They was like, “Miss [name], we really need you to take over this bus.” So I took over the bus. At first it was a little rocky. Then it changed up.

You know, because the kids know me from the community. So, you know, I kind of got them under control, and then they got out of control again, and then they started the green tickets. Well, it was certain kids that was on the bus that would still cut up. So I was like, I just went like this, I waved them in the air, and I had no more problems. They all got one.

This last topic of conversation, which seems a little tangential, nonetheless reinforces the overall theme—that positive communication and positive reinforcement need to occur for both parents and children.

When the parents were asked about their hopes for their children’s schooling, P1 said that she hoped the children would be prepared for college—that is prepared to succeed in college—and to live out the profession of their dreams. P1 said:

I don’t want him to be in the position that I was in; I thought I was smart until I got to college. And then, and then I realized that I was average, maybe even below average because I was not prepared for college. I’m hoping things have changed.

The parents agreed with this unanimously and seemed keenly aware of the fact that many kids are not prepared to enter college and that the freshman dropout rate is very high. P1 said, “Because you see some of them that just get pushed through the cracks. And then when they come out, they can’t even read.” Such lack of preparation was attributed to teachers who pass the children through grade after grade without making sure they can read, etc. P5 raised the question about how this kid gets promoted to the next grade. P3 corroborated saying, “You’re truly harming them, and I don’t understand...” P1 said, “As a parent, you know your child couldn’t read. But you allowed them to continue to promote them. So.”

When asked about their relationship with their child’s teachers and school administrators, the parents also unanimously agreed that they had a good—even great—relationship with their children’s teachers, and the teachers were widely perceived as warm and caring. As participants shared their experiences, P8 stated that she has a good relationship with all the teachers and they all look after her son and keep her informed if he does something wrong. She said, “He got eyes all over him, and he, everywhere he goes, so. And that’s important.” She further said:

My son came back from high school yesterday and saw his teacher from 6th grade, and you know what I mean, it’s nice that the kids want to do that. You know what I mean? That means something. Because the teachers were good. And my son had many problems with his teacher last year. Many, many, many, many problems because my son is not an angel. But he still had respect for her and still, you know what I mean? Knew she wanted the best for him in the end, and he

went and visited her yesterday and had a nice visit. And she was happy to see him.

P1 then spoke about how parents need to make sure they have a good relationship with the children's teachers and raised the question about whether the teachers reach out or the parents do. The others agreed that the teachers reach out, even to "shy parents," but they also agreed that they had made themselves available to the teachers from the beginning, which one parent characterized as an "open door policy" on the part of the parents. Most agreed that there were no problems, but even for those who had experienced a problem, it was quickly solved. The parents seemed generally aware that there are problem parents, but they did not seem to regard themselves as being in that category. P3 said,

One time I had a problem, but I solved that immediately. And within the next day, the whole problem was solved, and I never had a problem again.... I started out as the shy parent when my daughter started kindergarten. I was, like, never really talked. But it forced me to—now I'm like you, I don't even give them a chance....

When it comes to your kids, something comes out of you.

The participants seemed in agreement that teachers do make an effort to reach out to parents; P6 said, for example, "And I think a lot of the teachers, like with the discipline problems with certain children, they want those parents to come in." They also agreed, however, that "the parents won't come..." and P6 said, "And I'm sure they called and they, you know, there's a whole host of problems with that. With wrong phone numbers, phone numbers disconnected."

The parents expressed approval for a new evaluation policy whereby the teachers are required to make phone calls to the parents and document kids' behavior, whether

they're good or bad. They also suggested that the timing of parent-teacher conferences is important—meetings between parents and teachers shouldn't be limited to the first of the school year. P6 suggested that “instead of having that parent-teacher conference the first nine weeks, why don't you wait to after the second, after the second nine weeks... that's when you're going to start developing a problem.” P6 offered an example in which she thought everything was ok with the kid in algebra (in high school) because the teacher didn't communicate that there was a real problem. Regular parent-teacher conferences should be offered, and the teachers need to communicate to the parents if there's a problem.

Even though the parents agreed that it was their responsibility to keep on top of their children's school work and make sure they're doing it, it was clear that they would appreciate frequent, quality communication from the teachers. P7 said, “I get text messages from my daughter's 5th grade teacher every day. We could sign up. It was this new system. It was this system.” All participants agreed that text messaging would be a nice feature for all teachers and parents. P1 indicated that even if they look in the child's book bag and ask about homework, they don't always know for sure if the child has homework if they haven't heard from the teacher.

In answer to the question about how the parents would like to be involved in their children's schooling, the participants unanimously agreed that parental involvement is profoundly important. P7 said,

I know when my daughter was in kindergarten, I was always involved. The teacher encouraged that. Of course because it's kindergarten. You know what I mean? They asked for volunteers for parties for this and that. Well, then as she

got older, I understand they're older, but then it all sort of stopped. It's like they didn't want us around anymore.

There seemed to be some confusion about whether or not parent involvement is really welcome; some parents expressed that they didn't feel welcome to sit in on their children's classes, for example, and one mentioned that the teachers didn't seem to want parent hall monitors. The parents agreed that kids are generally out-of-control, and there seemed to be a notion that having the parents involved would help with the general disorder. P3 said, "Let's just say if there was a bad child, if their parents' participated, I think they would think twice about doing the things that they do in the hallways." The discussion turned to how bad some parents are with discipline; they convey a "hands-off" attitude about the teachers to the kids, who then become very defiant to the teachers. There was agreement concerning abundant evidence of poor discipline at home and at school both. Participant #7 said:

It amazes me how children – my daughter is in 5th grade and the things that she hears and sees. A little girl drew inappropriate pictures on her homework paper. They're sitting at the desk, and she turned around and she drew this inappropriate picture on my daughter's paper. I said, "Are you kidding me?" How does she even know, how does she know what—well, first of all it has to start with that girl's mother at home teaching that little girl respect. But here, what do they do? Do they get suspended? How far does discipline go here?

With the last question, I provided participants with the opportunity to discuss any other aspects that we had not yet covered. Many of the participants said they had already covered a lot, with one participant saying "I feel like...a lot of stuff [has come] out."

Nevertheless, P6 clarified something that had been said earlier about administrators and said that the problem is not with principals and assistant principals, but with administrators who are even higher up. They mentioned that politics is involved with the selection of higher level officials, so perhaps they felt that some of the positions are too political.

The parents also expressed dissatisfaction that the teachers are moved frequently with little notice. They felt that this was mistreatment of the teachers on the part of the administration. The parents seemed to understand that teachers might need to be moved so that they could keep their passion for their jobs, but they also felt that if teachers were doing a good job and didn't wish to be moved, they shouldn't be moved. P6 said, "Yeah, and then when I—what if I request and then they move and then my kid gets somebody I, and then I have to go through the whole rigmarole of moving and—that's my issue."

The parents then moved to a discussion of how everything seemed to come down to money, beginning with the discussion of the fact that there is a beautiful new computer lab in the school but no one hired to teach computer skills. They then began to discuss the curriculum change again and expressed the opinion that the change had been made because of money. They also talked about how the teachers are teaching to the tests, thus producing inferior skills so far as the students are concerned. There was some discussion about the tests' being unfair because of local differences (such as vocabulary) as well as finance, P3 said:

But it is, it is – they take the whole entire state, you take a district that they have the money and the resources and the teachers, and you pit them against a school that may be financially struggling, and everything's tight around here. You can't,

I'm sorry, you cannot sit and say, "Well, we're just going to test them as a whole." You're not, it's not fair –

They began then to discuss the fact that if there are no improvements, the state will take over the school, which was viewed as a bad thing overall, as there was general consensus that everything will go downhill, and the money problems will only become worse.

One parent revisited the topic of co-teachers, saying that he or she really liked it because it helped with discipline problems. From there, the topic of communication with teachers was revisited. In general, they all feel that this is very important. They fell to reminiscing about their days in school, with some expressing that their teachers were better than their kids' teachers are now.

From there, the conversation turned to dissatisfaction with substitute teachers and the fact that many become qualified to teach through a very minimal process when they really aren't prepared to teach. There was consensus that the process by which substitute teachers are made is "hush-hush" so that the parents don't really know what's going on. One person ended the discussion, however, by noting that at one point when a new curriculum was begun and letters were sent out to that effect, not one parent bothered to show up to see what it was about.

Table 6

Analysis of Parents' Focus Group Lived Experiences

Analytical Category Four lived existentials	Significant Quotations
Lived space (spatiality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I just don't feel it's a welcoming environment for everyone. Everyone doesn't necessarily feel welcome. And that starts from when you walk in the door. • We just, at home, I said, "Listen, this is what we're about to do." And I have to sit down with them, and we work over the summer, but when they finally caught on – my youngest daughter is really strong in math. And she enjoys it. Now I hate it. No, we were doing something, I'm like, "You're in 5th grade. Why are we doing this? What is this?"
Lived body (corporeality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Like I cringe every day that they come home and it's something new. • I'm treated badly, and I work here, so. • Yeah, you can sit back and watch it. • No no no, 'cause I was so stressed out about it. And no, every day I was sweating bullets. I'm like, "What are they bringing" • And they're skipping, and I hate it that they, they wouldn't focus on just the basic fundamentals of like math. • It's, it's very stressful because it's difficult as a parent when you don't feel like you can help your child. And it's bad when you really aren't smarter than a 5th grader. • I, yeah. I torture myself. And then I finally, I finally said maybe I should just stop and look at it and I realized, "Oh you dummy, it's the answer key." [laughs] But it's still, I still hate it. • ...say, "Oh, well, I don't know it, either." At first I said, "OK, is it me? And just is it me, I don't get it?" But no. Most parents don't. • When it comes to your kids, something comes out of you. Like me, my personal, there's some times when I don't have to talk, but if it's about my kids, it's a whole other person that comes out of me."
Lived time (temporality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ...that if you didn't know, you might think that's the way it is. [general agreement] And there for some parents, especially some parents who we have that are intimidated by just a school setting, based off of whatever their experience was coming up. • We're preparing them for life.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My hope and dream is that he goes off to college. I don't want him to be in the position that I was in, I thought I was smart until I got to college. • If it's something with math, I can't help you because I didn't learn that way and I'm too old to learn that way. [laughs]
Lived human relation (relationality or communality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have a good rapport with the teachers, too. If there's ever any issue or problem that occurs, they make me aware right then and there. • I think the teachers here build relationships with each one of their students. • We are active in our child's lives and as well as their education. Therefore, we will make sure that we have a relationship [general agreement] with the teachers and administration because we know that we're vital. • They're going and – yeah, it just stops. And they're going to college. We're preparing them for life. And I just think that you're totally doing them a disservice and, and again if there's a shy parent that's intimidated and they don't – or they may not even know how to, to approach and talk and... • I think there's a gap somewhere there between administration and teachers. • You walk into the office, you expect to be welcomed and greeted, and sometimes they don't even look up from what they're doing. • If there is an issue, you need to contact me immed—and we don't have any problems. And like I said, I just let them know to call me. And if I have a problem, I have their numbers on speed dial. I'll call them. • Because it's an open-door policy.
Potential risk factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They used to have all these assemblies for the awards. They completely cut that out. • But it's also hard for the new curriculum to adjust at home for the parents with the homework with the kids. • I mean, we used to get letters of, like updates of things – there was at one time a calendar that they used to send home every day. All that has been eliminated. • I'm sure they called and they, you know, there's a whole host of problems with that. With wrong phone numbers, phone numbers disconnected. • Because you see some of them that just get pushed through the cracks. And then when they come out, they can't even

	<p>read. How on earth did this kid graduate?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lot of them act that way because their parents tell them that they're right and nobody has the right to tell them that... • I mean, parents are too quick to, parents are just too quick to come to school with, you know, [talking over one another, unintelligible] and just cut them off. You know, the teachers based off of what the child said.
Potential protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My kids have adjusted really well, transitioned very well because they all came from Head Start. • I think the teachers here build relationships with each one of their students. • I think a lot of the teachers, like with the discipline problems with certain children, they want those parents to come in. • I get text messages from my daughter's 5th grade teacher every day • Let's just say if there was a bad child, if their parents' participated, I think they would think twice about doing the things that they do in the hallways. • Yeah, we have to do lots of research to be able to help your child with their homework. • When they do something well... when they do something well, they need praise so that they want to continue to do well. • Open house like the first week of school. And then they do parent-teacher conferences. • New evaluation that the teachers get now, where they have to make those phone calls so many times • Instead of having that parent-teacher conference [the first] nine weeks, why don't you wait to after the second, after the second nine weeks – so that's when you're going to start developing a problem. • I know when my daughter was in kindergarten, I was always involved. The teacher encouraged that–
Roles of parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If they're going to succeed and have that foundation, you better start building.
Systems theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't think it's so much teachers. The teachers are good at communication. I think it's more administration. The higher-ups. I think there's a gap somewhere there between administration and teachers.
Pedagogy of the oppressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • But it's also hard for the new curriculum to adjust at home for the parents with the homework with the kids

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you come from a business background [general agreement] and you have no education background, and you don't understand the stories of a lot of our kids and their back stories and what their home lives are like, you can't make a general judgment. • And our district is a unique district. It really is. And our kids have history. • They're constantly moving the teachers. They're constantly moving the teachers. Every two years. They put a teacher who has been teaching 2nd grade in kindergarten this year. She's been teaching second grade for like 15 years. And then they told her two weeks before school started.
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Parent Key Informant Interviews

I move next to a narrative of the interviews with the three parent key informants. A specific induction protocol was used that included an explanation of the parent key informant interview. The semi-structured questions posed to parents during the key informant interview process were as follows:

Parent Key Informant 1 (PKI1). The participant, an African-American male, arrived late to the interview. We met after school was dismissed and when all the students, most of the teachers, and all the staff were gone. The main conference room provided privacy for the interview. (One we started our discussion, the participant said that they were taking their kids to the store, so the time was short.) This participant was replacing his wife, who could not make it to the meeting because of a health issue. Both the participant and his significant other showed up to the meeting; I tried to persuade the wife to wait outside of the room, but she was determined to stay and she went right into the meeting room. I informed her that only her husband would be doing the talking and she agreed, however, during the interview she wrote notes and then gave them to the

participant so he could answer my questions. It was a very awkward situation, and the interview was tense. I was unsure about allowing her to participate but I decided to go ahead and make the best of it.

In answer to my first question about the children's experience in adjusting to elementary school, PKI1 said that his children's adjustment had been up and down, depending on the teachers. Math can present a particular problem, as some of the onus seems to be put back on the parents. He agreed that it is an adjustment, saying,

I think it's a lot more parental interaction, but I don't think it's positive. It kind of puts the onus on the parent instead of the teacher. Whereas, using myself as an example, we didn't have much parental interaction. You had to, you know, sit there and learn it on your own. And I think it takes away from the kids' learning.

In reference to the effect of the remodeling project and the frequent curriculum changes on the children academically, PKI1 did not think the remodeling had affected the children in any way. He said, "Yeah. They look forward to coming to school, so...." However, he did say, "Our kids, as far as the changing, going to school, they were affected by the playground.... A new playground was being built and during recess the kids couldn't go outside and play, and they didn't like that." Otherwise, the curriculum changes seemed to be a bigger issue, with math being especially difficult again because of changes from time to time:

And it kind of was confusing for, for my kid.... Yeah, the curriculum, the curriculum changes a lot. So you kind of get used to, say, a certain math or a certain reading, it's gone. And it, you know, it's a whole other learning

experience for the kid all, all over again. Sometimes it could be harder, sometimes easier. But for us in most cases, it's been harder.

In answer to the query about what he felt was needed from the school to help the child be successful, PKI1 stated that liked the co-teaching and the after-school program, for the most part. The parent didn't like being contacted about small disciplinary issues: "Tell so-and-so to stop picking with your child." That could have, in his opinion, been handled at school on the spot. He said, "I didn't like that. And saying, well, my children didn't like it, either, so." The parent also felt that the ratio of teachers to kids in the after-school program was too low.

When we talked about his hopes and dreams for his children's schooling, PKI1 said that he hopes his children can "maximize" everything—pick up on the classes, learn with greater ease. The parent agreed that one wishes better for one's children than for one's self, and he mentioned that getting ready for the tests was stressful, but that he hoped they would do well on the tests:

I'm not sure what the preparation is for it or how they, how they get the kids ready for the test, but even for the kids, it seems like it's a lot of pressure on them. Just being, being ready for it. Getting ready to take the tests.

PKI1 responded to the next question about his relationship with teachers and administrators with an overall negative perception (i.e., his first answer was "not too well"). He believes it is better with some teachers than with others; he perceives the teachers as "very private." He prefers face-to-face contact, because of picking up cues from facial expressions and body language, whereas the teachers seem to prefer e-mails. Elementary teachers were characterized as "excellent," whereas this parent perceives

high school teachers as no longer caring about the kids. About the elementary school teachers he said, “They kind of, they give the kids goals, things to work toward as far as just keeping them motivated for school.” The participant asked for guidance on what he should say about administration, and I replied that he could address any concern he wish to talk about. When he replied that everything was good with the administration, I decided not to pursued the topic further.

As we explores how PKI1 would like to be involved in his children’s education, he said that he would mainly like to be kept updated—warned if the child’s grades fall, etc., “whether it is good or bad.” He further explained,

If I have one child that’s an honor student, and once a teacher sees that their grades are at maybe mid to low C, sometimes a call would be, you know, is appreciated. Instead of just letting it keep go on and on and on, to where it gets to the point where the child is kind of failing.”

The main issue was communication, and he suggested workshops, as well as more parent-teacher conferences throughout the year. He said, “Like I said, the personal one-on-one more so than just e-mails or through notes. I’m more of a hands-on.”

In the final inquiry, I gave PKI1 the opportunity to discuss any other aspects that he would like to address that we had not yet covered. After a long pause, he expressed a liking for an activity at the school called “Storybook Forest” which was characterized as interactive for the kids and as giving the parents a good chance to watch what the kids are doing. He said, “The parents, you’re able to just watch, watch different things that your kid is doing as far as, trying, kind of teaching you. So that’s pretty interesting.” As an issue, the parent again mentioned constant curriculum changes, like in math, and

suggested that math groups might be helpful for the kids, like reading groups, recommending more of a link between the parents and the school.

Table 7

Analysis of Individual Interview: Parent Key Informant 1

Analytical Category	Significant Quotations
Four lived existentials	
Lived space (spatiality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yeah, that, that had, that was one thing that did have a negative effect because during recess, they couldn't really play [on the playground].
Lived body (corporeality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes with the way they handle different issues. Like it could be something as small as, "Tell so-and-so to stop picking with your child." They'll call home about that instead of just dealing with it on the spot. Just, like I said, just sometimes the way they handle things. I didn't like that. And saying, well, my children didn't like it, either, so...
Lived time (temporality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yeah, the curriculum, the curriculum changes a lot. So you kind of get used to, say, a certain math or a certain reading, it's gone. And it, you know, it's a whole other learning experience for the kid all, all over again. Sometimes it could be harder, sometimes easier. But for us in most cases, it's been harder. • That they could maximize that everything, the education they have to offer. More so, being able to pick the, pick up, learn the classes with more ease.
Lived human relations (relationality or communality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship with the teachers... some teachers, not too well. With others, it can be good. I – to me, they're very private. The communication, instead of being face-to-face or over the phone, they prefer e-mails. • Another thing, just elementary, in general, these teachers, I would say, compared to high school – these teachers were excellent. They kind of, they give the kids goals, things to work toward as far as just keeping them motivated for school.
Potential risk factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yeah, the curriculum, the curriculum changes a lot. So you kind of get used to, say, a certain math or a certain reading, it's gone. And it, you know, it's a whole other learning experience for the kid all, all over again. Sometimes it could be harder, sometimes easier. But for

	<p>us in most cases, it's been harder.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship with the teachers... some teachers, not too well. With others, it can be good. I – to me, they're very private. The communication, instead of being face-to-face or over the phone, they prefer e-mails. • Some teachers are a little stronger in certain subjects whereas – I think in particular, math. The, the math that they're being taught, I don't think is, is being taught well enough to where the kid can remember and carry it on to, as they go onto the next grade and so on. • Sometimes with the way they handle different issues. Like it could be something as small as, "Tell so-and-so to stop picking with your child." They'll call home about that instead of just dealing with it on the spot. Just, like I said, just sometimes the way they handle things. I didn't like that. And saying, well, my children didn't like it, either, so
Potential protective factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yeah. They look forward to coming to school, so. • There's one thing in particular that I did like. Toward the end of the year, they have the, it's like a Storybook Forest where it's probably 10 different rooms, but they're all kind of linked into one big story. That I, that's something that as a kid and parent, you really look forward to. Things like that, activities like similar, similar to that where you got a lot of kid interaction. • And uh, we have the parent-teachers at the beginning of the year usually. If that could continue throughout the course of the year, maybe each nine weeks, you know, just get an update because things change throughout the year. So just be able to get an update on how your child's doing. Whether it is good or bad. I would like the update.
Roles of parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whereas, using myself as an example, we didn't have much parental interaction. You had to, you know, sit there and learn it on your own. And I think it takes away from the kids learning.
Systems theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whereas, using myself as an example, we didn't have much parental interaction. You had to, you know, sit there and learn it on your own. And I think it takes away from the kids learning.
Pedagogy of the oppressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think it's a lot more parental interaction, but I don't think it's positive. It kind of puts the onus on the parent

Parent Key Informant 2 (PKI2). PKI2 was an African-American female who arrived on time for the key informant interview. We met after school was dismissed, and the students, teachers and staff were gone. The guidance room provided privacy for our meeting. I reviewed the participant consent and audio and video recording information. I provided an opportunity for any questions or concerns the participant might have.

I introduced the first inquiry, which focused on exploring the parent's perception of her elementary school-aged child's experience as well as the child's adjustment to the elementary school. PKI2 said that the adjustment had been fine because she had done a lot of prepping for it. Her children had some developmental issues, so she had felt the need to prepare. One of the things she did was talk to the school psychologist; then she took a tour of the school with the kids and got a chance to meet some of the people; so it was fine: "so it wasn't like, 'oh, big surprise.'"

When asked about how the school remodeling and frequent curriculum changes might have affected her children's behavior and academics, PKI2 said that the remodeling didn't affect her children at all. "They constantly have to deal with people and change, just in their everyday life, so it didn't affect them. They were just curious as to what was going on." The curriculum wasn't a huge issue either because she simply helps them with whatever they have to do and goes with the flow. She also seemed assertive about teaching the kids in her own way; she feels it doesn't matter how they get the knowledge so long as they learn it. She said:

I never really paid attention because I'm so focused on so many other things, like so many aspects of their education. It's just, "OK, if they say this is homework, this is what we're doing." And I never looked at the other curriculum. You know, so I don't know.

With regard to what she needs from her children's school, to help them to be successful in school, PKI2 had just one thing to say: "Communication." She would like the teachers to call and let her know so they can work together to solve any problems. Regarding her hopes and dreams for her children's schooling, she stated that she simply wants her children to be successful in school and to learn well. She wants them to do what they want (not necessarily what she wants) but to do it well. She said, "I just keep it like that because my dreams are mine, and theirs are theirs. So to me, it's whatever they want, and that's my job to make sure they get there, so...."

We discussed how PKI2 perceives her relationship with her children's teachers and school administrators, and she characterized it as "good," saying that nobody's perfect and that such relationships are what you make them. She knows that many parents complain about the teachers and administrators, but she realizes, when she goes to meetings, how stressful it must be for the teachers and administrators, too. Teaching isn't even first much of the time because of so many disciplinary problems. So you make the best of it. She had one problem one time because she knew she couldn't work with one of the teachers; so she just switched teachers, and that was the end of it. She's had a "good relationship" and says you just work problems out and go from there—everybody has to work at relationships. She said, "If you have a problem, you need to talk to them and try to figure it out and go from there. So just keep it simple. Don't try to complicate things.

At least that's just me, so." She again referred to communication with the teachers, with this parent showing herself to be very proactive in asking the teachers for more work, asking whether or not the child needed a tutor, and teaching them herself.

As we discussed how PKI2 would like to be involved in her children's education, she characterized herself as already involved, "really, really involved." She works at the school, so all the teachers know her, and she has all their contact information. She communicates a lot with the teachers and knows what her children are doing in school:

But I've established that. This didn't just happen overnight. It started way back in preschool. But I knew, like I had to do this to establish that relationship. In order to do it – I think it's kind of hard when you're just, you don't get to know a person. I don't know, I just, I worked this out for many years, but it's working, so. I'm not going to mess with it.

The final inquiry gave PKI2 the opportunity to discuss any other aspects that we had not yet covered. This parent did not have any additional issues. She characterized herself as not being one to rock the boat unless there's something major, and she said she tries to look at everything from the teachers' perspective also:

Like the job of the teachers, it's not easy. I wouldn't, I don't think I could be a teacher. Or, just being a parent is hard enough. So I just, I try to just, I go with the flow unless I see something is, that I really think – if I think it's something that's wrong, then yeah, I would say something, but I don't really get into all that. I have other things to do. You know, busy with school work and making sure that they're making the grades and actually understanding what they're learning.

Table 8

Analysis of Individual Interview: Parent Key Informant 2

Analytical Category	Significant Quotations
Four Lived Existentials	
Lived space (spatiality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> And they actually let us come on a tour, so my kids weren't as nervous when they started school, so they were familiar with the building and they got a chance to meet the people, so it wasn't like, "oh, big surprise."
Lived body (corporeality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> And I was worried about their adjusting, just because of, just developmental issues that they were having. And they actually let us come on a tour, so my kids weren't as nervous when they started school, so they were familiar with the building and they got a chance to meet the people, so it wasn't like, "oh, big surprise."
Lived time (temporality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> That, that they're successful in school. That they learn and retain everything they learn in school to help them further their education, no matter what it is. Whether it's trade school or college, or... just whatever they want to do is what I want for them.
Lived human relation (relationality or communality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think it's good. It's what you make out of it. But I've established that. This didn't just happen overnight. It started way back in preschool. But I knew, like I had to do this to establish that relationship. In order to do it – I think it's kind of hard when you're just, you don't get to know a person.
Potential risk factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> And I was worried about their adjusting, just because of, just developmental issues that they were having. You can see how stressful this can be, especially in the district that we're in. Where academics aren't actually the...it's not the greatest for a lot of kids and then some of the struggles that they have to deal with. You know, teaching it doesn't always come first. It's behavior, disciplinary, and then the kids get to learn,
Potential protective factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I need communication. I need them to – if there's a problem, I need them to be able to call and let me know. So I can, if I can't help them, I have to find someone else who can, and we can all work together to figure out what's the best for the child. And how we can solve the problem. If she's having trouble with math, I would call and just ask for either extra work or I would even ask the teachers, "How do I work with her at home?"

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • And as long as you have that solid foundation, they can teach you ten different ways. • They had a good adjustment.
Roles of parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm so focused on so many other things, like so many aspects of their education. It's just, "OK, if they say this is homework, this is what we're doing." And I never looked at the other curriculum. You know, so I don't know. • And as long as you have that solid foundation, they can teach you ten different ways, but as long as you know it, you know it, so.
Systems theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They constantly have to deal with people and change, just in their everyday life, so it didn't affect them. They were just curious as to what was going on."
Pedagogy of the oppressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can see how stressful this can be, especially in the district that we're in. Where academics aren't actually the, it's not the greatest for a lot of kids and then some of the struggles that they have to deal with. You know, teaching it doesn't always come first. It's behavior, disciplinary, and then the kids get to learn....

Parent Key Interview 3 (PKI3). Participant was a Caucasian female who arrived on time to our interview meeting. We met in the school building after school was dismissed; the students and all the teachers and staff were gone. The interview took place in a private office. Because we had already been through the group interview, only a short time was spent reviewing the consent to participant and video and audio recording. I again provided an opportunity for the participant to address any concerns regarding this interview.

In answer to the first question about her child's experience in adjusting to elementary school, PKI3 said the child had no problems adjusting. She attributed the lack of problems partly to Head Start.

In answer to the question about the effect of the school remodeling and the frequent curriculum changes on her child's behavior and academics, this parent did not

think the remodeling affected her child at all. She was much more negative on the curriculum changes, expressing displeasure with the changes in the way they learn math (she prefers the old way). “I’m not good with the Everyday Math.” She laughed. “I don’t really like the Everyday Math.” She noted that she thinks her younger child isn’t learning reading as well as the older one, who had a different reading program. “And the reading, I just, I really don’t like at all.” She elaborated on this a little, saying that her first child was reading at 2nd grade level when he was in 1st grade, whereas the second child, who is now in 1st grade, is reading at level.

When exploring what she needs from her child’s school, to help him to be successful in school, she also mentioned communication first, but was positive about the level of communication at the school, saying that it’s pretty good between teachers and parents. She thinks teacher-parent communication is very important. She did seem a little negative about the school’s changing the teachers around. But she again characterized her experience as very positive, citing her son’s 1st-grade teacher who writes notes about him at the end of the week to let his parents know how he has behaved. She said:

Right. Yeah, if they’re falling behind, I want to know right away. If they’re—even if they’re doing well, I’d like to know. Like his 1st grade teacher this year is real good about—at the end of the week, she’ll write a little note in the planner to say, ‘He’s done really well this week. He’s a good worker; he’s a good listener,’ so that helps, too. To know that they’re doing—communication, I think, is probably the key to that.

When we explored PKI3’s hopes and dreams for her child’s schooling she indicated preparedness: she wants her son to be ready for 7th grade when he leaves. Then

she hopes they will be prepared for college and then, after college, to live in the world. She said, “I just really hope they’re prepared.”

We next looked at how PKI3 perceives her relationship with her child’s teachers and school administrators. With the teachers and principal/assistant principal, the relationships are fine. She feels the higher administration is problematic, that there isn’t proper communication among the levels and that those on the lower levels aren’t allowed to function as they should. She said, “I just don’t think there’s enough ...I don’t think they’re allowed to do what they need to do. That’s what I think.”

When we discussed how PKI3 would like to be involved in her child’s education, she indicated that she used to volunteer a lot but that she can’t do that anymore. So she helps her children with their homework, and she feels this is important and part of her job. She loved to volunteer and be involved in her children’s classroom, but her work schedule now does not allow it. “Yeah, because it’s—everything’s got to start at home. So I know I’m a key part in his education. In life and in school.”

The final inquiry provided the participant with the opportunity to discuss any other aspects that she would like to address that we had not yet covered. PKI3 mentioned that she would like to see the curriculum changed a little bit. She mentioned the beautiful computer lab with no one to teach the kids how to use it, and observed that it is important for the kids to know how to use such technology. But she also mentioned being upset because the kids weren’t learning cursive writing—she was told they didn’t need it because they key everything in. However, she noted that they have to learn to sign their names. She said, “I don’t know what the problem is with that. If we don’t have the money

or—I don't know. But technology is a big part of our civilization right now, and that needs to be fixed.

Table 9

Analysis of Individual Interview: Parent Key Informant 3

Analytical Category	Significant Quotation
Four lived existentials	
Lived space (spatiality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NA
Lived body (corporeality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NA
Lived time (temporality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I hope that when he transitions from here, he's ready for 7th grade. I guess preparedness, I guess. • You're not helping us. And I don't think it's preparing....
Lived human relation (relationality or communality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Right. Yeah, if they're falling behind, I want to know right away. If they're – even if they're doing well, I'd like to know. Like his 1st grade teacher this year is real good about – at the end of the week, she'll write a little note in the planner to say, "He's done really well this week. He's a good worker; he's a good listener," so that helps, too. To know that they're doing—communication, I think, is probably the key to that.
Potential risk factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm not good with the Everyday Math. But since they both learned it from 1st grade, they're OK with learning it that way. I don't really like the Everyday Math. I'd rather [have it] the old way. And the reading, I just, I really don't like at all. • But I don't think I'm going to have a problem with that at all. I don't. If I can keep him on the track that I want to, with the teacher-wise. They keep switching the teachers, so I don't know if he'll get who I want him to have. So, we'll see.
Potential protective factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He's well-adjusted • With a good teacher, which I've had, all the teachers I've had, you know, my kids have had, I've had good experiences. • I'm willing to help, whatever, (but?) that's probably my involvement.
Roles of parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think it's got to start at home, even before like preschool. I know once he comes home, I have to do the homework with him and help him, so I guess I got to be a teacher, too. Yeah, because it's – everything's got to start at home. So I know I'm a key part in his education. In life and in school.
Systems theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I used to volunteer a lot, and I can't really do that now. • I'm willing to help, whatever, (but?) that's probably

	my involvement.
Pedagogy of the oppressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't think there's very much communication there.

Summary of Interviews

An examination of the data in terms of comparing the overall answers from the teachers and the parents yields both similarities and differences that are helpful in identifying emergent themes. These essential themes, in turn, form an infrastructure for the descriptive and interpretive dimension of the lived experiences of teachers and parents. They are fundamental to the experience and understanding of the total phenomenological dimension. They are the “aspects or qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is” (van Manen, 1990, p. 107).

Identifying Themes

Following the transcription of the data, the original recordings were reviewed with the assistance of the transcriptions and field notes, followed by the process of data reduction. During data reduction, the transcripts were read and the audio and video tapes listened to and watched over and over, with particular attention paid to observing participants' body language and listening to their tone of voice, pauses, etc. to get a clear and well-rounded sense of the whole interview. Key elements of each interview were highlighted (van Manen, 1990). A case-by-case analysis of the individual and focus group interviews was performed. Then, a cross-case analysis was conducted for the purpose of determining themes that emerged across the interviews. These themes were identified in relation to their quantity, which was the number of times they appeared, and their quality, or their relationship to the research questions under review in this study.

Following the narrative description of the interviews, the categories are organized into tables that provide a concise view of the phrases of significance and their relationship to the analytical categories.

Table 10 presents the analytical categories and the themes clustered under each category as well as each participant's indication of the identified themes. Each participant unit is defined as follows: Teacher focus group (TFG), Teacher Key Informant 1 (TKI1), Teacher Key Informant 2 (TKI2), Teacher Key Informant 3 (TKI3), Parent focus group (PFG), Parent Key Informant 1 (PKI1), Parent Key Informant 2 (PKI2), Parent Key Informant 3 (PKI3).

A valuable aspect to the data analysis in this current study was thematizing emerging throughout the cross case analysis process.

Table 10

Matrix of Identified Themes

Question #	ANALYTICAL CATEGORY		TFG	TKI1	TKI2	TKI3	PFG	PKI1	PKI2	PKI3	Total
1, 2	Existential and corporeal experience	Lived space	x	x			x	x	x		5
		Lived body	x	x	x		x	x	x		6
		Lived time	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	8
		Lived relation	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	8
3	Risk Factors										
		Students' academic preparedness	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	8
		Teacher/parent lack supportive communicative relationship	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	8
		Lack of parent involvement	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	8
		Administrator/teacher lack of communication and support	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	8
		School Climate-Parents, teacher and school staff relationship: unwelcoming & unfriendly	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		7
		Ethnic multicultural awareness: lack of community awareness	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	7
		School finance	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	7
		Adequate instruction and support	x	x	x	x	x			x	6
		Changing teacher grade level	x	x	x		x		x	x	6
		Empathic understanding: shy/intimidated parents	x	x	x	x	x		x		6

		Positive reinforcement	x			x	x	x	x	x	6
		Students' social/emotional preparedness	x	x	x	x	x				5
		Feeling respected: sense lack of professional integrity	x	x	x		x	x			5
		School building, physical Structure	x	x	x	x		x			5
		Time: To connect with parents and fulfill work demands	x	x	x						3
		Supplies	x	x	x						3
4	Protective Factors										
		Teachers expectations for students achievement	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	8
		Teachers reporting student progress to parents	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	8
		Positive-home-environment: cheerlead, coach, motivate & enforce	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	8
		Involved parents and teachers relationship	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	8
		Parent/teachers conferences and links	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	7
		School building physical appearance: air conditioning, comp lab, blackboard, playground	x	x	x	x		x			6
		Technology	x	x	x		x				4
		Student positive reinforcement	x		x	x	x				4
5	Parents' Role										
		Provide positive-home-environment: get student to school, make sure children are fed and have good sleep, teach basic social skills, cheerleader, motivator, enforcer	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	8
		Parent support and communication with teachers	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	8
	Unique Units of Meaning										

		PSSA testing		x			x			x	3
		Lack of resources	x								1
		Subs teacher qualifications					x				1
		State taking over the school					x				1

A Comparative Summary of the Findings

The thematic findings of this current study are revealed through van Manen's (1990) four life world existentials. This theoretical underpinning informed the research question: "How do teachers and parents perceive the role of the parents' involvement in supporting their children who attend a particular school that is undergoing child-centered pedagogical changes?" In order to explore this question, several subsidiary research questions were developed, as follows:

1. What are the lived experiences (lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived relations) of parents who have a role in their children's learning in elementary school?
2. What are the lived experiences (lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived relations) of teachers who have a role in their elementary school students' learning?
3. What potential risk factors are associated with parent-teacher engagement as they are involved in their children's or students' educational processes?
4. What potential protective factors are associated with parent-teacher engagement as they are involved in their children's and students' educational processes?

5. What are the roles of parents in children's learning in elementary school?

Four Lived Existentials

First, taking up this comparison in terms of the four lived existentials, the phenomenon examined in this research that relates most closely to the lived space of the participants is the school remodeling. Here, the reaction of the teachers differed rather sharply from that of the parents in that the teachers at least felt that the remodeling had some impact on their lived experience, whereas the parents uniformly found it either not at all or not very significant, finding it unnecessary, for the most part, to comment on it. One parent participant did make a comment relating to the existential lived body, indicating that the remodeling affected the children's ability to play on the playground, which had made his children unhappy.

As teachers shared their experiences during the remodeling, they addressed at least two existentials in their comments: lived space and lived body. A teacher who loves the air conditioning reflected on the time when the "weather was 100 degrees and we were dying," and another teacher commented on how they would "open up the windows and all the bees flew in and wasps flew in," resulting in screaming students. The teachers also commented about the architectural design, indicating that the rooms are now too small. Their greatest concern seemed to be the importation of 5th and 6th graders, as the school had previously been K-4. The whole dynamic of the school and of the students' behavior changed, making for a less respectful environment. They also mentioned some less than desirable aspects of the cafeteria design, as well as the fact that the students' lockers are around the corner, creating a potential for distraction and disturbance.

The teachers also mentioned some points with regard to the existential corporeal experience for the children also, noting two areas in which the lived body experience directly affects education: basic physical care and discipline. First, they noted the responsibility parents have to make sure the children are fed, have proper hygiene, and have enough sleep. One teacher mentioned that a child who says “I did not eat; I’m hungry” cannot learn his lessons properly. Second, the following exchange from the Teacher Focus Group demonstrates the need for children to learn self-control of the body so that education can take place:

...many of the kids we deal with, they can’t even sit still in a chair. They can’t walk down the hall. And the scary thing is that’s why we read about them in the paper five years down the road, unfortunately, because they don’t learn those things that they need to cope with in real life. And I think that’s more important. And I think if we get those things more under control, the academics would fall into place. But I think we don’t often, don’t put that as a priority, and we end up just spinning wheels because when they don’t have those things in place, they can’t absorb the other stuff and take it to the next level.

P8: I’m still telling a little girl to sit down.

P5: Um, in 4th grade, 5th grade, 6th grade. I mean, I’m amazed. And even jumping back to what I need from parents, more than anything, even if you don’t – just teach them like the basic skills of how, how we sit, how we focus, how we listen to somebody by looking at them. Because I do think that they go home and some homes are loud and chaotic, and that’s OK at home. But that’s why they come to lunch and class and – I mean I’ve spent five weeks teaching them how to line up,

sit still, raise your hand, and it's going to probably be all year. And they might not still have it next year. And that's so much time wasted.

The other two lived existentials—lived time and lived human relations—were addressed repeatedly in a matter about which both teachers and parents expressed strong feelings: the curriculum changes. The teachers mentioned time: they are given no time to learn a new curriculum, time to get used to a new grade level, time to communicate with the parents. One teacher who had taught first grade for 18 years was suddenly moved to second grade with little or no time to prepare, about which she commented that she felt like a first-year teacher again. When discussing the curriculum changes, the teachers strongly agreed that they do not feel supported by the administration. Participant 7 gave some specifics about the lack of support: there is no adequate instruction for the teachers when they are changed from one grade level to another, and there is no mentor system, as in other school districts. The changes have been very chaotic, with both teachers and kids feeling shortchanged. It was also mentioned that when there's a curriculum change, the teachers are almost never consulted. The teachers agreed that their opinions are not valued when it comes to curriculum. In addition and in terms of further demands on their time, the teachers expressed discouragement about having to fill in more and more for what parents should be doing at home.

For their part, the parents used strong words to express their feelings about curriculum changes. They expressed feeling confusion and said it was “torture” and a “nightmare” to try to help their children with new math and reading curricula, in particular. One parent characterized herself as “‘sweating bullets.’ I hate it that...they wouldn't focus on just the basic fundamentals of like math.” Participants compared the

way they learned math to the way their children are being taught math and acknowledged the need for memorization and repetition. A parent talked about how the teachers are going around in circles instead of simply teaching the kids how to divide. She believes that teachers should teach kids easier, faster ways, and she said, “You’re not helping us. And I don’t think it’s preparing....”

Another parent mentioned that some of the students had learned math another way, and now, with the curriculum change, they must relearn it. A parent spoke of how at home she sat with her kids, explaining what they need to do, and they worked on it through the summer. Then, about the time the kids would catch on, there would be something new: “like I cringe every day that they come home and it’s something new.” Another parent remarked, “It’s, it’s very stressful because it’s difficult as a parent when you don’t feel like you can help your child. And it’s bad when you really aren’t smarter than a 5th grader.” Yet another added, “I, yeah. I torture myself.

Any discussion of problems with the curriculum changes tended quickly to morph into a discussion of relationships with both teachers and parents. Van Manen (1990) spoke about the relationships of parents, teachers, and children as a “special lived relation to the other” (p. 106). He explained further that this relation is highly personal and charged with interpersonal significance. In this lived relation, the child experiences a deep sense of support and security that will help him or her to evolve into a mature and independent individual. In this relational dynamic the child experiences the adult’s confidence and trust “without which it is difficult to make something of oneself” (p. 106). The teachers expressed a need for better communication and better relationships with the parents, and on this issue, the parents and teachers seemed entirely in agreement. The

teachers were almost unanimous in saying that when they did have contact with parents, it was good, and the relationship is good. Even though most of the teachers found that parents could be very defensive, they were also in agreement that the parents don't always know what their job is. Parents sometimes feel intimidated by teachers and other school personnel; an illustration was given by one teacher parent who went to a meeting concerning her child with five people on "the other side of the table," and she "felt like an idiot," she said. Thus, they strongly agreed that one couldn't blame parents for feeling intimidated.

The parent participants also tended strongly to perceive the teachers as warm and caring people, and the two seemed to be understanding and supportive of one another's problems. When a parent spoke about how the parents need to make sure they have a good relationship with the children's teachers and raised a question about whether the teachers reach out or the parents do, the others agreed that the teachers reach out, even to "shy parents."

During the parents' discussion it emerged that some teachers are more helpful than others and that the atmosphere established at the school can seem unfriendly and unwelcoming. In particular, they agreed that parents are often made to feel as if they are "a bother." The parent who characterized the atmosphere at the school as "unfriendly and unwelcoming" added, "I just don't feel it's a welcoming environment for everyone. Everyone doesn't necessarily feel welcome. And that starts from when you walk in the door." The participants unanimously agreed that this can be an issue for some parents, especially some parents who are intimidated by a school setting, based on their own experiences. In particular, they agreed that parents are often made to feel as if they are "a

bother.” Participant 7 said, “You walk into the office; you expect to be welcomed and greeted, and sometimes they don’t even look up from what they’re doing.”

Both teachers and parents agreed that relationship problems often are caused not by the teachers or the parents but by administrators. As mentioned earlier, the teachers feel that administrators go over their heads in making decisions about curriculum changes, and in this way, they feel that their professional integrity is attacked. In addition, teachers sometimes do not wish to pass children along to the next grade, knowing that they’re not ready, but it’s ultimately the parents’ decision, especially if administrators do not stand up to the parents over the issue.

Risk Factors Perceived by Parents and Teachers

NEA President Dennis van Roekel (2008) observed that progressive teachers, in our new era, seek school environments that support their work, places where they can have a voice and be recognized for their efforts. The way principals carry out their job has a profound effect on how the school is organized and on teachers’ job satisfaction.

In this study three main risk factors emerged from the teachers’ responses: lack of respect and support for the teachers from both administrators and parents, lack of communication between parents and teachers, and lack of parental involvement in the children’s schooling. In addition to being required to adjust to new curriculum with no notice or to being moved from one grade to another after years of service, as has been noted earlier, the teachers cited lack of support even in physical items, such as lack of supplies or having to make sure there are enough desks in the room. Some of them believe that much money is being wasted, and that the school administration is too politicized so that no real reform is possible.

Sometimes the teachers also find it very difficult to get support from the parents. If they try to reach out to the parents, it can be almost impossible to reach them, as they may not answer the phone. One teacher said, “I have some parents that are very involved and call and check up. And then I have parents that I call and call and call, and never return calls or notes.” The teachers mentioned needing cooperation when the kids are getting negative feedback (i.e., the parents need to show up to take care of a problem and not avoid the teacher, etc.); parents need to read to and listen to their children, help the children with their homework, and, especially, place importance on education. Success has more to do with the attitude at home toward school than with how bright the child is. There was strong consensus that cheerleading, coaching, and support are badly needed from the parents because the foundation of the child’s education is in the home. Many parents do not supply this, and some of the teachers mentioned that they worry about the next generation because, in many cases, the grandparents are essentially raising the children and taking responsibility for them.

Interestingly, there were a few differences in what the parents identified as risk factors. In the focus group, they tended to identify curriculum changes, uncaring administrators, unqualified substitute teachers, and lack of parental discipline as the greatest threats. Some of the parents noted that their children who were studying the new curriculum were not doing as well as their older siblings who had experienced a different curriculum. In addition, as has been discussed earlier at some length, parents feel completely inadequate to help their children with math, in particular, given the frequent curriculum changes and what they seemed to regard as bizarre ways of teaching math, which one parent characterized as going in circles. They expressed their belief that the

new ways of teaching these subjects do not prepare the children for life, but they are still being passed from one grade to another, despite being unprepared. One parent characterized it as “child abuse.”

As noted earlier, the parents agreed fully with the teachers that lack of communication is a serious drawback, but one parent noted that this lack might come from the administrators rather than the teachers. In the Parent Focus Group, the participants were quite open in discussing the fact that they felt that some school administrators at the higher levels are not qualified for the job. Participant 6 was the most vocal in expressing dissatisfaction, but there was widespread agreement among the rest:

When you come from a [name of field withheld] background and you have no education background, and you don't understand the stories of a lot of our kids and their backstories and what their home lives are like, you can't make a general judgment. Like when we were at that meeting, [one administrator] said ... Um, “Well, it's like a business. You want everybody to feel welcome.” But it's not. It's a school. And these kids have to be educated. And it just irritates me a little bit, I guess. Because there's a lot of things that they try to do – and I know this because I work here, too. They're always stopped. They get so far and then they're always stopped. And it, I'm sure it gets frustrating for them [the teachers], so they just don't want to try anymore, you know.

The parents also seemed unanimous in asserting that some of the administrators (not all) were not good communicators and that the atmosphere at the school was unwelcoming. They expressed dissatisfaction that teachers are moved frequently, with little notice, saying that if they are doing a good job, they should be left where they are.

They also noted some concerns about wasted money, observing that there is a beautiful new computer lab at the school but that no one has been hired to teach computer skills. One parent said, seemingly out of the blue, that the award assemblies had been abolished, and there was widespread agreement that these needed to be brought back, as they had observed positive reinforcement working well with the kids. This somewhat tangential topic reinforced the overall theme expressed by both teachers and parents—that positive communication and positive reinforcement needs to occur for both parents and children.

Lack of qualified substitute teachers was also discussed at length among the parents in the focus group. Parents expressed concern at the way substitute teachers are able to get a certificate for teaching without being really qualified to teach. Participant 3 related an incident in which the school was going to put in a sub for a teacher going on maternity leave. P3 knew this sub and knew that his teaching skills were very poor, so she was determined that he would not be used. She told one of the Principals, ““I swear every parent in that classroom. We will get together and this will not happen.” Upon being asked, then, what she thought they should do, she recommended a friend of hers who had already interviewed with the school district and who had just obtained her teaching license. “Well, they brought her in and she wound up teaching, but as a parent if you—see, they were going to try to pull a fast one until I found out, so.”

Whereas the teachers spent more time addressing the lack of respect for an education in the home culture, the parents identified lack of parental discipline as a significant risk factor, affecting both the atmosphere at the school and their own children, and they very strongly condemned the poor disciplinary methods they had observed in other parents and the lack of backup the teachers get from the parents. Participant 6 said,

“There was a little girl in the cafeteria a couple days ago screaming at a teacher, ‘You are not my mother. Don’t put your hands on me. My mother said I don’t have to listen to you.’” Someone replied, “Oh, you get that all the time.” P6 finished her story by saying that the teacher simply turned away, whereas she thought the teacher should have taken the girl to the office. P3 said,

And you, and if she’s in 5th grade doing that, what is she going to do in 12th grade when something doesn’t go her way? There was a girl last year that was upset because her grandmother sided with the principal. She said, “I don’t care what he said, he was wrong,” cussing her grandmother out. ... I said, “Have you lost [your] ever-loving mind?” ... See, it’s scary because they are not going to be prepared for the world. See, the world could care less about your little attitude. And it’s not going to get you anywhere.

According to van Roekel (2008), effective school leadership has a profound impact in raising standards, improving teacher quality, and holding schools accountable for results. The New Teacher Center (NTC) survey results confirm that school working conditions—including time, teacher empowerment, professional development, leadership, and facilities and resources—are critical both to increasing student achievement and retaining teachers. Research indicates that besides performing their everyday functions, principals must understand the need to (a) develop new skills and learn innovative ways of doing things to provide a safe, flexible, challenging and responsive to the needs of multicultural populations; (b) understand school and classroom practices that contribute to high student achievement in order to influence the work of teachers; (c) provide optimal conditions that will benefit both students and staff, including safe and modern

school facilities, fair compensation and benefits for personnel, adequate and sustained funding, sufficient time for planning, community support, and effective and sufficient instructional materials; (d) use student achievement data to guide improvements. This is critical to managing the curriculum in ways that promote student learning; (e) design the school work day and work year to provide teachers with time for collaboration, as well as opportunity for timely and adequate professional development tied to the teaching and learning process; and, (f) share authority and responsibility by learning to empower and support teachers.

Protective Factors Identified by Teachers and Parents

For the teachers, most protective factors stem from the parents: parental involvement, the ability to communicate with the parents, meeting and knowing the parents, etc. The teachers were very strong in identifying parental involvement as a protective factor for children. Such practical aspects were discussed as at least making sure the kids get to school, are fed, and have plenty of sleep belong to the parents, but beyond that, they need to make sure the children do their homework. In the discussion on this issue, a strong protective factor that emerged was an encouraging parental attitude toward education. In the Teacher Focus Group, the following exchange occurred:

P5: ...a lot of times a child's success has nothing to do with like their intellectual ability. I mean some of the children that have the most strikes against them as far as what they're bodies and minds are capable of doing are some of the best students because they've grown up with the expectation of this is what you do. And that makes all the difference. I can tell the kids who go home and it's not going to matter what their teacher says about behavior or about their school work

because that's not an important thing at home. So, and that makes the biggest difference. Just the attitude.

P1: It is a cliché, but it is true. It does start at home. It does.

P3: It's the foundation. That's the foundation.... The child's first teacher is the parents.

One teacher mentioned that there is sometimes more support at home than she thinks, but she doesn't know the family. They agreed that establishing a good relationship with the parents is important, and that they should take care not to let it be adversarial. In the focus group, there was discussion on the need for community so that people know each other. At least two other teachers mentioned that when they call the parents with a problem, they mention something good about the child first so that the parents will not feel attacked, and one teacher even asks the parents if they've observed anything in the child's behavior at home and, consequently, if they can offer any suggestions for helping the child out.

The parents, from their perspective, tended to meet the teachers half way in terms of what they feel is needed to protect their children. Whereas they perceive many of the teachers as interested and caring, they identified the element of time in communications as important. They mentioned wanting to see parent-teacher conferences earlier in the semester so that, if the child is not doing well, the problem is identified earlier. They tend to assume, if they hear nothing from the teachers, that the child is doing well, and then they are surprised if the child gets a bad grade. Several expressed the idea that a phone call from the teacher would be nice, and one person observed that he does better with face-to-face contact than with e-mails.

Perceptions of the Parents' Roles

The teachers agreed that the parents' role is very important, even vital. They agreed that parents should be a support system, and they spoke of how difficult it is to work with children when there is no support at home. It makes a very big difference when the parents are supportive and keep in touch with the teachers. Many suggestions were made here: the parents' time, communication, a phone call now and then. At least one teacher clarified that he or she does not expect the parents actually to teach them.

The parents agreed that it was their responsibility to keep on top of their children's school work and make sure they're doing it; even so, it was clear that they would appreciate frequent, quality communication from the teachers, as the curriculum changes present difficulties in their ability to help the kids. On this point, the teachers tended to be sympathetic with the parents, noting that parents don't always know what their job is. One teacher parent illustrated by telling a story of how she went to a meeting at her child's school with five people on "the other side of the table," and she felt like an idiot, she said. Thus, there was strong agreement that one couldn't blame parents for feeling intimidated.

Emergent Themes

The purpose of this study was to examine how parents and teachers perceive their roles as they support children in a school that is undergoing pedagogical change, and to discover how the parent-teacher engagement manifests itself. From the data gleaned from two focus groups, one teacher and one parent, and six key informant interviews with three teachers and three parents, three overriding themes have emerged, which can be

succinctly summed up in four words: Communication, empathy, oppression, and school climate.

The Need for Communication

The parents and teachers were unanimous in saying that communication was needed in several ways: from teachers to parents, from parents to teachers, between parents and children, and between administrators and teachers. In the Parent Focus Group, when asked “what do you need from your child’s school to help him or her be successful in school,” the immediate answer was, “Maybe a little more communication.”

The parents referred to concrete means of communicating that they had liked—“letters...updates...calendars”—and they were unhappy that these means had been eliminated. A parent spoke of one teacher who sent an automatic text at the end of each school day, letting the parents know about the homework assignment, and most agreed that such a system would help. At least one parent in an individual interview mentioned

staying updated. Like if I have one child that’s an honor student, and once a teacher sees that their grades are at maybe mid to low C, sometimes a call would be, you know, is appreciated. Instead of just letting it keep go on and on and on, to where it gets to the point where the child is kind of failing. So just the communication. (PKI1)

Another parent expressed much the same sentiments:

I need communication. I need them [the teachers] to – if there’s a problem, I need them to be able to call and let me know. So I can, if I can’t help them, I have to find someone else who can, and we can all work together to figure out what’s the best for the child. And how we can solve the problem. (PKI2)

The parents expressed approval for a new evaluation policy whereby the teachers are required to make phone calls to the parents and document kids' behavior, whether they're good or bad. They also suggested that the timing of parent-teacher conferences is important—they felt that meetings between parents and teachers shouldn't be limited to the first of the school year—and that communication should continue beyond the elementary school. Parents were also concerned about the lack of communication prevailing at the high school. One parent said,

If they're going to succeed and have that foundation, you better start building. You can't wait until 12th grade to decide, "Oh we're going to sit down and communicate with the teachers." You had 11 years to do that, you know.

Regular parent-teacher conferences should be offered, and the teachers need to communicate to the parents if there's a problem. Parents agreed, though, that it was their responsibility to keep on top of their children's school work and make sure they're doing it; even so, it was clear that they would appreciate frequent, quality communication from the teachers.

The teachers, on their part, were very positive about their relationship with the parents they actually meet. The percentage of such parents is small, they said, but such parents they find very supportive. The teachers desire a strong and communicative relationship with parents. Several suggestions were made: "I need their time. Give me at least a phone call a week. Communicate. I mean, I know we have planners, but write in them. I have parents that don't even care." Another teacher mentioned needing cooperation when the kids are getting negative feedback (i.e., parents need to show up to take care of a problem and not avoid the teacher).

The teachers frequently alluded, albeit somewhat indirectly, to the need for parental communication with the children. Parents need to read to their children and listen to their children read, help the children with their homework, place importance on education. One teacher remarked,

...when I send home homework, I notice that I'm not getting a lot of homework back. So that tells me that whether it being the reading area or other areas, other subject areas, they're not returning it. They're not getting the proper help. I get a signature or I get a note about the child but not per se on their homework or the involvement that they need to put the time after school with them, helping them with their homework.

Another teacher added, "Taking ... a true interest in what they're, what's going on in school. When they come home [the parent should say to them], 'What did you do today? What did you learn? Let me see your homework.'"

Both teachers and parents expressed concern that communication between administrators, particularly at the higher levels, and teachers is inadequate. Many negative comments emerged in the discussion about the curriculum. Many felt that there is constant change, so that no one can ever get used to anything. One teacher, who had been teaching first grade for 18 years was suddenly moved to second grade, with no prior warning, and she feels as if she's back to being a first-year teacher all over again. There is no adequate instruction for the teachers when they are changed from one grade level to another, and there is no mentor system, as in other school districts. The teachers agreed that their opinions are not valued when it comes to curriculum. One of the teachers remarked:

Yeah, and I think it, I think it just makes a difference in everything because when you're, when you're more confident in what you're teaching, when you know you have things prepared, you can – I think the kids even know. I think they know when you're calm and everything's good, and they know when you're on edge and even if you try to cover it up. And so it's even trying to cram everything into 35 minutes. Copier is broken and you haven't gotten your manual yet. And now you've got another – that makes all the difference.

The Need for Empathy

According to van Manen (1991) it is “common wisdom that nothing breeds success like the experience of success” (p. 58). He posed the question “What makes a school insecure for children?” and explained that “uncaring schools produce students who do not care” (p. 58). In caring schools, teachers show that they care by teaching in a personal manner and demonstrating that they believe in their students by setting challenging expectations for them. The parents participating in this study spoke about their deep appreciation for the teachers in this urban school, saying things like “I think the teachers here build relationships with each one of their students.” Another parents said, “They give the kids goals, things to work toward as far as just keeping them motivated for school.”

Van Manen (1991) perceives pedagogical understanding as fundamental to the task of parenting and teaching, and it is facilitated by trustful sympathy. van Manen described sympathetic understanding as going beyond empathy. He explained that an empathic understanding of people who differ markedly from ourselves is sometimes hard to imagine, because it can be difficult to transport “our own inner life into the other

person” (p. 97). Pedagogy requires a stronger and more personal understanding on the part of the educator than empathy allows. As opposed to empathy, sympathy presumes that the other person already lives in us and that we recognize the experience of the other person as a possible human experience and consequently as a possible experience of our own selves. For example, children are likely to describe a parent or a teacher whom they judge to be sympathetic as warm, open, and understanding.

In the interviews, it became apparent, on the positive side, that one of the strongest manifestations of parent-teacher engagement emerged in terms of empathetic/sympathetic understanding. On the negative side, almost all of the complaints that were voiced, as well as desires expressed for greater support and respect, could be traced back to a lack of human understanding, kindness, and empathy.

One aspect often mentioned by the teachers is the human need to listen and be listened to. Listening is one of the activities of an empathetic person. The teachers spoke of the need for parents to talk to their children about “listening to the teachers.” When the teachers expressed their desire for support and communication from the administrators, one of them said, “They should listen” when the teachers are having problems.

In talking about the curriculum changes and identifying the profound value of parent involvement, as well as noting their ongoing efforts to reach and connect with parents, most of the teachers, even as they observed that parents can be very defensive, were in agreement that the parents don’t always know what their job is. The teachers believed that parents often feel intimidated by teachers and other school personnel, and an illustration was given by one teacher parent who went to a meeting with five people on “the other side of the table,” where she “felt like an idiot,” she said.

I'm going to [be] the devil's advocate. Because, being on the educational side, teaching is my profession. It's easy for me to know what the expectations are. But then having a young child that can't read, I mean, cannot read, and from a parent's point of view, we don't have enough time to communicate as much as we wanted to our parents. And then parents who are not in education don't always know how to handle it because, not saying education is not important and all of that, but like they don't always know the guidance or what we need from them. And now, I mean personally, now I'm hitting heads with my child's special ed teacher because here I am a professional, and I'm saying – and I don't mean to get personal, I'm just using it as an example. But like I know that my child needs this, this, and this to get his basic foundations back to read. And then his special ed teacher is like, "Well, if we knew what was in those children's minds, then our job would be easier." And almost like everything is put back on me. "Well, you just need to do that at home" type of thing. So I guess what I'm trying to say is we, as professionals, know what parents, we feel that parents should do. But at the same time, parents don't always know what their job description is.

As this teacher further explained her experience, she said,

"Well, and I know, and I know, I know like some of us even go into meetings and even right away, like, "We're here to help your child. We're here to support your child." But like to feel like you're not even "listened to" and to feel like your ideas aren't even..."

Some of the parents, in their turn, expressed great empathy with the teachers.

They expressed dissatisfaction that the teachers are moved frequently with little notice.

They felt that this was mistreatment of the teachers on the part of the administration. They understood that teachers might need to be moved so that they could keep their passion for their jobs, but they also felt that if teachers were doing a good job and didn't wish to be moved, they shouldn't be moved.

Empathy and respect are so closely linked that it is almost impossible to experience one in the absence of the other. Teachers spoke of the need for parents to teach their children basic skills such as respect: "just the fact that everybody's different and, and I expect you to listen to that person and do what they're asking you to do. And I expect you to be polite and just that reinforcement..." They also talked about their desire for parents to be supportive, be respectful of the teacher and the school.

The parents, in their perceptions of how the children are disciplined, were even more forthright in their comments about the way some children are allowed to show disrespect for the teachers. In a discussion about poor behavior, one parent remarked, "A lot of them act that way because their parents tell them that they're right and nobody has the right to tell them that..." Another parent, speaking of her own upbringing, agreed and contrasted the way her own parents had treated such matters, saying "Even when I was right, I was wrong." One of them said, "There was a little girl in the cafeteria a couple days ago screaming at a teacher, 'You are not my mother. Don't put your hands on me. My mother said I don't have to listen to you.'"

One of the parents displayed strong and practical empathy in terms of the discipline problems the teachers must cope with, going so far as to take matters into her own hands. She said,

there was this boy in this class, like he cut up. When I found out, the teacher was so upset, you know. And she told me, she said, “Do you know today...” because she looked like she was about to be in tears. She said [that] this boy cussed her out and called her out and called her the F-word and everything else in between, and she said, she was just done. So I said, “OK, don’t worry,” I said – because she said they won’t do anything about it. I said, “Well, when I get off of work, I’m going to go to the office and talk to them because you may not be able to say what you want, but I can.” So when I went and I called Miss [name] and Mr. [name] in the office, and I said, “Listen. We have a problem.” I said, “He is distracting the ones that want to learn, and my daughter’s a good student.” I said, “She should not have to put up with this.” And I said, “I’m expecting you to do something about it today.” And you know, he came and got me the very next day. He said, “I handled it. He’s removed.” She was fine. Because if he’s a distraction, it’s not fair to the children who are being good. Punish the one who is being bad, not the one, the ones who want to learn. And I said, “You’re not helping her.” And I said, “It’s wrong.” And I said, “He’s disrespecting these teachers.” I said, “As a parent – no, I’m upset about it.” So they, they handled it, so I can’t complain.

Discussion on issues surrounding student preparedness raised another major field wherein the teachers, in particular, believe a lack of respect is shown. The teachers spoke about their responsibility to prepare the students, providing them with the appropriate knowledge and skills that will help them to be successful as they move on in their schooling. However, they expressed frustration because they feel that their opinion about the students’ preparedness is not valued. Ultimately, the decision belongs to the parents

as to whether the child should advance a grade, and the administration usually acquiesces to the parents' wishes. Then, the teachers feel that their professional integrity has been violated and that they are not respected as the experts.

Another expression of empathy mentioned by the teachers relates to the role of the parents in their children's education. There was strong consensus about the need for parents to provide a positive home environment to their children in which the parents are "motivators and enforcers. They need to motivate their children to get to school on time, to be prepared. They have to kind of be cheerleaders for them, to let them know that, that they value education." Parents "motivate their children to want to learn and enforce some simple rules so that they, they actually get their school work done." Teachers also agreed that they themselves must be empathetic in terms of "coaching the parents and giving them the encouragement and tips on how to help their students out."

Aspects of Oppression

The theme of oppression was prevalent, and though never overtly mentioned, was tacitly present in much of the discussion, emerging from the various exchanges about three main aspects: the curriculum changes, cultural issues, school climate, and the teachers' and parents' hopes for their students and children, respectively.

Curriculum changes. For a number of years, this urban school district used the program-driven Scope and Sequence curriculum for instruction. Teachers used the program (i.e., the texts) as the guide for teaching. Then Pennsylvania released its State Academic Standards along with the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) testing. This began a gradual shift in teacher awareness of grade level competencies and expectations. However, the school continued to use its texts to meet these state standards

and to “cover” the material on the PSSA. Now, with the implementation for Common Core Standards, the school district is moving away from program/text-driven instruction and looking at how well students can apply the grade and content knowledge, and the district has been actively revising its curriculum map to reflect the shift. A kindergarten teacher says, “You’re not having the fun that you used to have. Now we’re talking about the PSSAs and preparing our children.” With these relatively rapid shifts, neither teachers nor parents have felt prepared. In addition, to find the most appropriate curriculum has been a long and arduous process in part because the school has been a financially troubled community.

Freire’s (1970) work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which serves as part of the theoretical underpinnings for this study, has indicated that the preparation of teachers is neglected. Freire explained that the continuous preparation of teachers is of paramount importance and that it is impossible to think about changing the face of schools, about helping schools become serious, rigorous, competent, and happy without providing continuous adequate instruction for teachers. This continuous teacher preparation should take place when whenever possible through reflection on practice.

By way of contrast, the teachers in the interviews lamented the lack of preparation and/or instruction in connection with changes in the curriculum. A teacher made the comment, first, that when there’s a curriculum change, the teachers are almost never consulted. Another teacher reflected on the lack of preparation:

The curriculum changes I think are not conducive at all. I kind of liken it to giving a 10-year-old keys to a Cadillac before you teach him how to drive. A lot of the things that we’re asked to do. We’re asked to do them without the proper training.

For instance, the reading program that we got, we were never specifically trained on the different components of the reading program. It was just introduced to us, and we were shown the materials, but we weren't exactly shown how to use them. So I think that's a big mistake that our district keeps making is not having teachers trained before they start. They're reactive. They're not proactive enough. I mean, they're... they'll give us the training after the fact, but at that point you may have been using the materials for two or three years before you get the training, so I think it just, it would make more sense to me if you trained a person first before you give them the materials.

The parents also expressed extreme frustration with the curriculum changes, using such strong words as “nightmare” and “torture” to indicate their feelings of powerlessness. The participants felt both a short-term frustration, in that they have trouble helping their children with homework, and a long-term frustration in terms of worrying about their children's preparedness to face the world. In the short term, as already seen earlier in this chapter, parents expressed confusion over the way the children are taught, particularly in the new math curriculum. One parent characterized herself as “sweating bullets” and indicated that it is humiliating to feel as if one isn't as smart as a 5th grader.

In terms of parents' long-term concerns, some of them are worried that their children are not learning as well as those who had the earlier curriculum.

Well, I don't think [name] is going to learn as well, or do as well in reading as [name] did, who had the SFA, and I forget what they switched to now. I don't think – and I think the way they test them and what they have to know is a little

harder. It seems, like when he was in kindergarten, he had to know 60-some sounds. He had to do 60 sounds in one minute. For a kindergartener, I think that's a little much. And I think that affects test scores, too, and doesn't really project how well a child is doing in the classroom. So I don't think – not that he's not going to do as well. But I don't think he's going to learn, or be as advanced as [name] was. Once he hits 2nd grade, like, he's going to, like right now, he's on grade level. Whereas in 1st grade, [name] was on a 2nd grade level in reading. And I think that has a lot to do with the reading programs that they switched. So we'll see next year, but.

As indicated by all of the discussions on the curriculum, the effort is aimed at getting children prepared for tests, not necessarily for life. Van Manen (1991) speaks to the fact that “learning cannot be positive in schools where testing madness reigns and where many students regularly and inevitably experience failure” (p. 58). One concern is school's struggle to meet Academic Yearly Progress (AYP) standards, or accountability. This struggle affects not only the teachers but also parents and the children. One of the participant said,

So PSSA and—that's a stressful time. Same with, they tried the Keystones, you know. And it seemed like those tests were pretty tough, too. I'm not sure what the preparation is for it or how they, how they get the kids ready for the test, but even for the kids, it seems like it's a lot of pressure on them. Just being, being ready for it. Getting ready to take the tests.

Cultural issues. The literature speaks widely of the world of diversity in the United States and the many barriers that ethnic minority and low-income families and

children, in particular, have to overcome. Such barriers can result in a lack of community, of people simply knowing one another. One teacher brought up the issue of the lack of community—she has sometimes found out that there’s more support at home than she realizes, but the problem is she doesn’t know the families. Teachers and families need to know each other on a personal level. P3 noted, in referencing a certain student and her parents, “they’re going to give her more support at home because they know her teacher personally.”

Teacher P4 spoke of differences between what we might call “parent culture” and “teacher culture”: “Well, the way they [the parents] communicate is different than the way we [the teachers] communicate. And not that they’re unprofessional, but you know, there’s just – I think it goes back to, you don’t feel intimidated because there’s not that barrier there.”

The parents also referred to broader cultural issues in relation to testing. First, they spoke of the difficulties that children in this small urban community face with testing, and they then mentioned language issues and the possibility of cultural bias in the PSSA and Keystone tests:

P1: ...in this area, who says “shrub”? We say “bushes.”

P3: But it is, it is—they take the whole entire state, you take a district that they have the money and the resources and the teachers, and you put them against a school that may be financially struggling, and everything’s tight around here. You can’t, I’m sorry, you cannot sit and say, “Well, we’re just going to test them as a whole.” You’re not, it’s not fair –

Language is a barrier to learning to many people. As we move into the world with the human uniqueness that we each bring into the world, it gives a deep sense of confidence and freedom to be who we are and be accepted and loved for it. Delpit (2002) wrote about the language we speak when she said,

Jus as our skin provides us with a means to negotiate our interactions with the world—both in how we perceive our surroundings and in how those around us perceive us —our language plays an equally pivotal role in determining who we are: it is *The Skin That We Speake*. (p. xvii)

Delpit (2002) also talked about the difficulty of overestimating the importance of people's attitudes and beliefs about language, indicating that when listening to someone speaking, the listener immediately draws conclusions about the speaker's social class background, level of education, and geographical location. She said, "We hear language through a powerful filter of social values and stereotypes" (p. 66).

This evaluation system never takes into consideration any "knowledge from life experience" that the children may bring with them to school. Therefore, the poor students are placed in a disadvantageous position. Freire (1970) addressed this concerns, saying that the experience of children from the middle class results in the expectation of the acquisition of a middle-class vocabulary, prosody, syntax—in the final analysis, a linguistic competence that agrees with what the school regards as proper and correct. Freire further explained that "the experience of poor children takes place not within the domain of the written word, but within direct action" (pp. 16-17).

Freire (1970) recounted the lived experience of a college professor named Giroux, who said that on particular day at Massasoit Community College in Massachusetts, he

gave a speech to about 300 unwed mothers who were part of a GED (graduate-equivalency diploma) program. One of the women stood up and eloquently said, “Professor Giroux, all my life, I felt the things you talked about. I just didn’t have a language to express what I have felt. Today I have come to realize that I do have a language. Thank you” (p. 22). This is a very familiar scenario that many experience.

Freire (1970) recounted another experience, this time one of his own, about the time he gave a book to an African American student at Harvard to read a chapter to see how she would receive it. He said that a few days later when he asked the woman if she had read it, she enthusiastically responded, “Yes!” She went on to say that after she had read it, she gave the book to her 16-year old son to read; and after he had read the whole chapter one night, in the morning he said, “I want to meet the man who wrote this.” Freire said he had a question for all the ‘highly literate’ academics who find Giroux’s and Freire’s discourse so difficult to understand: Why is it that a sixteen-year-old boy and a poor, “semi-literate” woman could so easily understand and connect with the complexity of both Freire’s and Giroux’s language and ideas, and when the highly academics, who should be the most literate, find the language incomprehensible? Freire believed the answer had little to do with language but a lot to do with ideology. He further said that people often identify with representations that they are either comfortable with or that help deepen their understanding of themselves. He said that the call for language clarity is an ideological issue, not merely a linguistic one (pp. 22–23).

In general, at the teacher-parent-student level, the participants were in agreement that a good level of harmony prevails among the three. Most of the parents were positive in their responses about their children’s adjustment to the elementary school, indicating

that the children had few or no problems and that they were liking it. The teachers were apparently perceived as warm and caring, and the parents unanimously agreed that they had a good—and even great—relationship with their children’s teachers.

The teachers, for their part, gave a few instances of ways in which they attempt to relate to the children within their own cultural contexts. One person spoke of a miscalculation when she began teaching in an attempt to help a child:

Sometimes I did [failed to connect] in the beginning, when I first started teaching.

There were different organizations at my church, and I would have different clothing for some of my students when they didn’t have it. Coats, sweaters, hats, and one particular day I gave one of my girls a coat. And a mother was very upset with me. And I thought I was helping, but I was damaging the relationship that I had with the mother. Because she was, I guess she just was too proud. I knew what the child had. I wanted to help. But that backfired.

The same teacher recounted how she speaks to the children about perseverance in language they can understand. She told them how she learned to ride a bike, how she fell off over and over; she got scraped knees, but she got on the bike again and again until she conquered it.

Do you know, two days later, two of my kids came to me and said, “Miss [name], guess what? I learned how to ride a bike. ... I learned how to ride a bike, Miss [name]. I got on there and I said, ‘I’m not going to fall. I’m not going to fall, but I fell, and I got up and I scraped my knees all, because I scraped up my knees, too.’” And they would tell me, “Yes, I know how to ride a bike now.” At least

two out of 20. Went home, two days later, and rode a bike. That was the best news to me, you know.

Another of the teachers spoke of attempting to talk to the students in terms they will understand:

You know, as far as in the future, of course I would like our students to continue with their education, and I do try to show them as many statistics as I can about the correlation between income and education. Money does seem to be something that they, they want. So I kind of use that to try to get them. I know that's not exactly an intrinsic motivation, but at least it's something they can see that's tangible that if they continue their education, they have a better chance of making more money in this lifetime and having a better life. So I do try to tie it into that sometimes.

School climate. The literature overwhelmingly speaks to the profound effect of the environment on an individual, particularly on the developing child. A school is the second most important place in a person's life. Therefore, school climate is a critical issue that could represent a barrier to learning, and a variety of factors can lend to climate. A strong sense of community in the school staff is one of the most effective ways of nurturing the spirituality of teachers (Wolf, 1996). Sanchez (2008) asserts that school climate is "best achieved by aligning the sensory ritual to one or more of three universal positive perceptions: You are safe, you are wanted, and you can be successful" (p. 50). The teachers spoke of the recent school remodeling, indicating that architecture is very important creating a conducive environment for learning, and all participants agreed that the school cafeteria, as one example, is not conducive to learning because it provides

a setting for bad behavior. Many teachers also agreed that bringing the 5th and 6th grade student to a K-4 grade school changes the behavior dynamic of the school. The older students are often not good role model for the youngest students. The older students tend to create a lot of discipline problems, making a less respectful environment.

But I think our internal route has a lot to do with the behavior of the children and how we need to basically, you know, get onboard with parents on the need for them to be involved. A lot more involved. Especially in the area that we live, live in.

In relation to school climate, one parent then brought up that the award assemblies had been abolished, and there was widespread agreement that these needed to be brought back, as they had observed positive reinforcement working well with the kids. However, with the latest curriculum changes, positive behavioral interventions and supports to improve the student behavior have also been implemented. Part of this service is a reward system that has been gaining popularity among the children and teachers. In the discussion about the need for positive reinforcement for the children, the parents mentioned the need for just such an award system. P8 specifically mentioned the need for changes in awarding good behavior on the bus:

...because the problem is, like last year when I was a bus aide, they never gave me enough tickets to hand out to the kids, and then you had to pick and choose what kid got it. And when the whole bus was good, you didn't have enough tickets to give to the whole bus. You know what I mean? So I don't know if they changed that this year and gave them more tickets, but I have that problem because I have two bus rides with kindergarten kids. And the kindergarten kids, if

they're sitting down and behave, they all expect to get it. You know what I mean?
They're not 5th and 6th graders.

The parents seemed to have a low level of awareness about such services, as it was noticeable, throughout the interview that there were a few other issues about which the parents did not seem to be knowledgeable. Perhaps this is an issue that needs to be addressed by the school administration as it is evidence of the need for an open channel of communication, not just within the school but with the school community as whole. Freire (1990) spoke of the need for good communication channels in order to facilitate for the involvement of the parents in various activities.

The parents felt that there is a problem with an unwelcoming climate in the school, also. One of them said, "I just don't feel it's a welcoming environment for everyone. Everyone doesn't necessarily feel welcome. And that starts from when you walk in the door." The participants unanimously agreed that this can be an issue for some parents, especially some parents who are intimidated merely by a school setting, based on their experiences growing up. In particular, they agreed that parents are often made to feel as if they are "a bother."

Daring to hope. Van Manen (1990) wrote that he cannot conceive of the idea of a teacher who has no hope for his students. He further said that without hope, teaching loses its essence. Both teachers and parents were asked what hopes and dreams they have for their students. In the Teacher Focus Group, the immediate answer was that the students would be "proficient"—that is, "benchmark." As the discussion continued, another teacher expressed a desire for the children to "like school." One teacher mentioned that she hoped for social and emotional growth

because for them that's what's going to be the most important because a lot of [them] are going to start topping off 5th or 6th grade as far as what they could do academically. But you know, being able to sit beside somebody and work with them, and get along with them, being able to attempt something without melting down, that—and unfortunately there's no magic test at the end of the year to see I'm a good teacher in that aspect of things, but for me, especially where we teach. Because so many of the kids we deal with, they can't even sit still in a chair. They can't walk down the hall. And the scary thing is that's why we read about them in the paper five years down the road, unfortunately, because they don't learn those things that they need to cope with in real life. And I think that's more important. And I think if we get those things more under control, the academics would fall into place. But I think we don't often, don't put that as a priority, and we end up just spinning wheels because when they don't have those things in place, they can't absorb the other stuff and take it to the next level.

Whereas the teachers engaged in a fair bit of discussion about their hopes in both the private interviews and the focus group, the parents had somewhat less to say. Here, anxieties emerged about preparedness, as most of their hopes focused on wanting their children to be prepared to go to college. Parent P1 answered first in the focus group, and the following exchange occurred:

P1: I just want my child... to be able to compete once he leaves, once he leaves, not only the elementary school, but leave, you know, [the town]. ...My hope and dream is that he goes off to college. I don't want him to be in the position that I was in; I thought I was smart until I got to college. And then, and then I realized

that I was average, maybe even below average because I was not prepared for college. I'm hoping things have changed. I do work in different districts, and I do see where the curriculum is a little more challenging than what we have here. I understand that some of it may have to be watered down in order to have a good graduating rate. However, we do have, we do have college-bound students. And my hopes and dreams is that by the time he gets through, that he's prepared because he, he already knows that he wants to become a doctor. And even that might change. He might wind up wanting to be a plumber, but he said right now that he wants to be a doctor. So he needs to be able to compete, whatever college that he chooses, so that's my, my hope and dream for his schooling is that he gets everything that he needs. You know, that he has the skill set.

P8: I think that's everybody's hope and dream for their kid, yeah. To be able to ... go to school and still prosper when they leave here.

P6: Yeah. Without a college education they're not going to be able to do anything. They won't be able to live. Because you can't live on what they're paying people now without a college education.

....

P1: The freshman dropout rate is high. The freshman dropout rate is very high, and that's because a lot of students just are overwhelmed and not prepared.

P6: Well, and that goes back to the curriculum.

....

P5: Because you see some of them ... just get pushed through the cracks. And then when they come out, they can't even read. How on earth did this kid graduate? ... How did this kid get promoted to the next grade?

P3: You're truly harming them, and I don't understand...

P1: It's abuse. It's child abuse to me.

P3: ...you took an oath as a teacher to teach. If you, I don't care who they were. I don't care how special they were. No, you don't OK that ... Because you're harming them. You're not helping them.

The parents agreed with this unanimously seemed keenly aware of the fact that many kids are not prepared to enter college and that the freshman dropout rate is very high.

Thus, preparedness—and anxiety that the kids would not be prepared to compete in the real world—emerged as a major concern, particularly from parents, almost to the point where it seemed to dim their hopes for their children. In this context, one of the parents also mentioned that he would hope the children could learn better because the tests are “stressful.” Freire’s (1993) work speaks to this parent’s concern as Freire observed that in the evaluation process, the assessment of knowledge, the evaluation criteria the school use to measure students’ knowledge—intellectualism, formal study, bookishness—necessarily helps these children from the so-called privileged social classes and hurts children from poor and low socioeconomic backgrounds. These knowledge- based evaluations are used when the children first arrive in school and throughout their stay in school.

In the same context of preparedness, the parents also noted that everything seemed to come down to money as they discussed the fact that there is a beautiful new

computer lab in the school but no one hired to teach computer skills. As one parent said, “technology is a big part of our civilization right now, and that needs to be fixed. I guess that would be an issue I would have. Yeah. Yeah, they need to find a teacher to do a computer course for these kids. ‘Cause it has to start at an early age.”

Interview Summary

The interviews contained discussions of profound importance for the pedagogical engagement that occurs between parents and teachers in the education of their children and students, respectively. During my focus group and individual interviews participants expressed a variety of similar concerns. Teachers and parents both, for instance, identified the curriculum changes as a topic of concern; another point that was agreed upon was a lack of communication between teachers and their superiors, as well as between teachers and some of the parents. Their concerns were similar with regard to parental intimidation by the school environment and a resulting lack of participation on the part of the parents, and both expressed concern that children are often moved ahead grade by grade without the required preparedness. Both parents and teachers also spoke about the paramount importance of parental involvement to help solve the discipline problems.

The teachers spoke about the parents’ need to make the environment interesting for their child to learn, to ask questions and listen to their children stories about their day at school, and to support them as they do their homework, as well as attending to matters of nutrition, hygiene, and rest. In short, they need to reinforce the teachers’ effort to provide the children with the needed skills to fulfill their hopes and dreams. Both parents and teachers talked about the need for supporting one another and maintaining an open

line of communication to ask for and provide the needed guidance to help and support the children's learning. The teachers acknowledged the tremendous relief they feel if they can go to a parent with any concern (academic or disciplinary) and if they know that the parent will back them up. Parents expressed intense emotions regarding the challenge they often face while helping their children with homework because they lack the knowledge or understanding of the curriculum that is being taught to their children. Both teachers and parents talked about the need to celebrate the children success, and both enthusiastically shared stories and acknowledged the power of school events—such as parent orientation, parent teacher night, story walk activity, and awards assemblies—to engage parents in their children learning.

Further, all of the interviews revealed descriptions of teachers' commitment to their work with the children. Participants, both parents and teachers, were able to identify the profound impact of the lack of proper and timely training and lack of communication and support from their administration in their work with the children. Teachers claim that their role and responsibility is to assess students' preparedness to move forward to a new grade, but they often are not consulted or are at least overridden. The teachers spoke strongly about their relationship with parents, characterizing it as generally good with involved parents and voicing their concern about non-involved parents, discussing ways to engage shy/defensive parents.

On the other hand, parents also talked about their good rapport with the teachers, embracing their work and commitment to prepare their children. They also discussed the need for the school to reach out to the intimidated parents, and, in general, they recognize the teachers' effort and willingness to reach out to the shy and intimidated parents.

Making a school environment a more safe and welcoming was a concern for both parents and teachers.

Finally, several methods were employed in an effort to strengthen this study. As explained in a previous chapter, triangulation is used to facilitate validation of the data through cross verification by means of combining multiple theories. For this purpose, I use van Manen's (1990) four lifeworld existentials, Paulo Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bio-ecological model of human development as the theoretical basis for the data analysis. Analytical triangulation consists of using multiple analysts' sources of data, whereas investigator triangulation uses evaluators to analyze and interpret the data. For this purpose, I employed participants' feedback at the end of each individual and focus group interview to ensure that the study is valid in a qualitative sense, as well as rigorous and spirited, as suggested by van Manen (1990, 1997).

Chapter Summary

The purpose of the current study has been to explore the experiences of teachers and parents in an urban elementary school undergoing child-centered pedagogical changes. Although the school has put in a great deal of effort over the years to change both the school profile and the face of the school, a matter of great concern remains: the deficit in the students' academic and behavioral performance and the struggles to build a sound working relationship with parents in the best interest of their children's schooling and social emotional growth. Experts in the field of education (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Freire, 1970; Sanchez, 2008; van Manen, 1993) agree that the ability for schools to begin to successfully promote the perceptions that students are safe and wanted, and can be

successful is intricately linked to the concept of *relationship*. The analysis of six individual interviews and two focus group interviews with eight teachers and nine parents in an urban elementary school in western Pennsylvania revealed participants' mixed experiences and attitudes regarding school pedagogical changes. Most participants appreciated having both the individual and group processes, because it gave them plenty of opportunity to voice their opinions.

This chapter has presented the data collected during the two focus group and six individual interviews. This chapter contains narrative descriptions of the interview process that provide illustrations of phrases of significance related to the research questions. These narratives also incorporate my observations from the interview session and my reflective journal. Also provided in this chapter are tables that organize the phrases of significance into a clear picture of the data obtained. The chapter concludes with a cross-case analysis of the phrases of significance within the main analytic categories obtained through examination of the data.

The following chapter provides a comprehensive discussion of the findings in this study, as well as the implications of these findings, conclusions, and recommendations related to the themes and to the school pedagogical change process. The next chapter also contains the relation between themes and the literature, and a discussion of the implications for future research.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter discusses the findings of this study with relation to the original research questions. Because the findings in this study speak to the importance of the school counselor's role in facilitating parent-teacher engagement, this chapter also includes an explanation of the implications for the parental role and for the school counselor. A few hypotheses are drawn from this study and its limitations are identified. Several recommendations for further research are presented, along with a number of questions that this study has raised, and a summary concludes the chapter.

Van Manen (1986) wrote, "Teachers and parents, as pedagogues, enthusiastically open themselves to the children, and do their best to understand the situation of *this* child paying close attention to the way this child experiences life in its multifaceted dimensions" (p. 13). The aim of this qualitative, phenomenological-existential study was to examine the lived experiences of teachers in an urban elementary school located in Western Pennsylvania. Previous chapters have portrayed the background, development, implementation, and analysis of this study. A rationale for the study was presented, research questions were provided, and the related literature was reviewed. The methodology was outlined, and descriptions of the data collection and analysis were provided. This chapter will provide an analysis of the findings relative to the theoretical framework and the research questions guiding the study. The chapter incorporates information about the findings, which support the current literature and which will add to the body of literature. The findings will be presented and interpreted, along with theoretical implications, recommendations for educational leaders, recommendations for future research, conclusions, and a summary.

Discussion of Findings

This study was directed by a protocol that uses semi-structured interview questions. In this section, I discuss how the themes that emerged provide answers to the original research questions of this study. This session presents an interpretation of these findings.

Research Question 1

The first research question for this inquiry is “What are the lived experiences (lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived relations) of parents who have a role in their children’s learning in elementary school?” The aspect of lived space seemed of least concern to the parents, especially with regard to the school remodeling project, which (with the exception of one parent) they did not seem to regard as very significant. Two of the lived existentials—lived relations and lived time—emerged strongly in the parents’ discussion of the curriculum changes. They used strong words to express their feelings about these changes, indicating that they encounter great difficulty in their lived relations with their children in helping them with schoolwork at home and characterizing this experience as “confusing,” “a nightmare,” and “torture.” One might wonder if this aspect of the parent-child relationship may place undue stress on how the parents and children relate at home. Van Manen (1990) spoke about the relationships of parents, teachers, and children as a “special lived relation to the other” (p. 106). He explained further that this relation is highly personal and charged with interpersonal significance. In this lived relation, the child experiences a deep sense of support and security that will help him or her to evolve into a mature and independent individual. In this relational dynamic, the

child experiences the adult's confidence and trust "without which it is difficult to make something of oneself" (p. 106).

In terms of another aspect of their lived relations—the parent-teacher relationship—the parent participants strongly advocated a good relationship with their child's teacher and the school administrators. The parents also unanimously agreed that they had a good—even great—relationship with their child's teachers, and the teachers were widely perceived as warm and caring. This is especially true for those parents who made themselves available to the teachers from the beginning, which one parent characterized as an "open door policy" on the part of the teachers. The parents seemed more cognizant than one might be led to believe, however, in terms of which teachers are good and which are, in their opinion, inferior, as they also were unhappy with some of the school's decisions in hiring subs. Their negative comments revealed a deep level of unhappiness with "the system" as it is currently administered; yet they seemed to feel somewhere trapped, feeling also that the teachers are trapped with them. This feeling of powerlessness in their lived relation to the administration taps into Freire's (1970) theories concerning the pedagogy of the oppressed.

As for lived time, the parents revealed that they were thinking ahead for their children when they discussed their hopes and dreams for the children's schooling. Their main concern—which relates to some of their concerns about teachers and administrators—is that their children be prepared to pursue a higher education and to be able to function in the world. Parents know that without an education, life will be difficult for their children. Tied to their concerns for their children's futures is their concern about excessive testing and the effect it is having on the children's learning and level of

preparedness. The Department of Education demands that schools meet accountability standards through the State Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA), and this system has become a tremendous source of stress for everyone—school administrators, teachers, and parents—in this urban impoverished school community. The testing and standards are both actually what give rise to the frequent changes in the curriculum.

Another way in which parents expressed the existential of lived time was in references to their need to be involved with their children. The factor of time can be a barrier to parental involvement (Epstein & Becker, 1982), so one interesting observation here is how little the parents actually referred to time as a problem in being involved. Rather, they expressed a desire to help their children with their schooling, particularly when the school is undergoing pedagogical changes and even expressed enthusiasm about attending school workshops, parent/teacher conferences, and children's awards celebrations. It is possible that the parents' expressed willingness to engage, even at school, arises from their strong conviction that parents' role in their children's learning is pivotal. They, too, seem to share the universal dream of the microsystems of "school and home" working together toward the success of the students and celebrating their success.

Research Question 2

The second question was "What are the lived experiences (lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived relations) of teachers who have a role in their elementary school students' learning?" First, the teachers seemed much more aware than the parents of the existential of lived space, a natural outcome because they spend a great deal of their time at school. Their discussion of their experiences during the remodeling thus addressed both lived space and lived body, as reflected in comments about the relief of

having air conditioning against 100-degree weather and not having to keep the windows open so that the bees and wasps could fly in and disturb the children. The teachers' concerns about the architectural design partly related to their own lived experience of the smallness of the space, but the greatest concern seemed to be over the importation of 5th and 6th graders, as the school had previously been K–4. The whole dynamic of the school and of the students' behavior changed, making for a less respectful environment. They also mentioned some less-than-desirable aspects of the cafeteria design, as well as the fact that the students' lockers are around the corner, creating a potential for distraction and disturbance.

The teachers also evidenced care for the existential corporeal experience of the children, noting two areas in which the lived body experience directly affects education: basic physical care and discipline. First, they noted the responsibility parents have to make sure the children are fed, have proper hygiene, and have enough sleep. One teacher mentioned that a child who says “I did not eat; I’m hungry” cannot learn his lessons properly. Second, the following exchange from the Teacher Focus Group demonstrates the need for children to learn self-control of the body so that education can take place:

...many of the kids we deal with, they can't even sit still in a chair. They can't walk down the hall. And the scary thing is that's why we read about them in the paper five years down the road, unfortunately, because they don't learn those things that they need to cope with in real life. And I think that's more important. And I think if we get those things more under control, the academics would fall into place. But I think we don't often, don't put that as a priority, and we end up

just spinning wheels because when they don't have those things in place, they can't absorb the other stuff and take it to the next level.

P8: I'm still telling a little girl to sit down.

P5: Um, in 4th grade, 5th grade, 6th grade. I mean, I'm amazed. And even jumping back to what I need from parents, more than anything, even if you don't – just teach them like the basic skills of how, how we sit, how we focus, how we listen to somebody by looking at them. Because I do think that they go home and some homes are loud and chaotic, and that's OK at home. But that's why they come to lunch and class and – I mean I've spent five weeks teaching them how to line up, sit still, raise your hand, and it's going to probably be all year. And they might not still have it next year. And that's so much time wasted.

Two lived existentials—lived time and lived human relations—were addressed repeatedly in a matter about which both teachers and parents expressed strong feelings: curriculum changes. The teachers mentioned time: they are given no time to learn a new curriculum, time to get used to a new grade level, time to communicate with the parents. When discussing the curriculum changes, the teachers strongly agreed that they do not feel supported by the administration. It was also mentioned that when there's a curriculum change, the teachers are almost never consulted. The teachers agreed that their opinions are not valued when it comes to curriculum.

The continuous curriculum change is part of the inherent changes that occur in a school. However, for change to be effective it needs to be planned. Freire's (1970) work spoke to the need to plan and to involve all concerned parties. "Knowledge is power" wrote Francis Bacon. Knowing and being prepared impart confidence, and confidence

provides structure. People notice when others are confident—when they are no longer experiencing oppression.

The teachers also manifested both lived time and lived relation in speaking of their need to get to know their students and to communicate with their students' families. Freire (1970) asserted that “discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action” (p. 65). Such action takes time, but it yields fruit in terms of lived relations. The lack of a school community concerned the teachers, as they spoke to the positive impact of having knowledge of the community and knowing the parents at a personal level. In impoverished urban communities, children often bring with them a number of issues, issues that need to be attended to in order to help the students to be able to learn and be successful. Teachers spoke about children coming to school “feeling hungry” or not doing their school work because there was “nobody home to help.” These are matters that cannot be ignored or postponed until there is time. Teachers also spoke of their desire for open communication with parents and school administrators and for working together toward the preparedness of their students. The need for communication is critical in this urban community; both parents and teachers agreed strongly on this matter.

Research Question 3

“What potential risk factors are associated with parent-teacher engagement as they are involved in their children's or students' educational processes?” The themes that help to answer this question include aspects of oppression and cultural issues and school climate. Specifically, both parents and teachers identified many risk factors, most having to do with human relationships.

This question was answered, first, as the teachers explored their experience with school remodeling and curriculum changes. Three main risk factors emerged from the teachers' responses to the remodeling and a curriculum changes: they lamented the lack of preparation and/or instruction in connection with changes in the curriculum, and the fact that they are almost never consulted. In addition to being required to adjust to a new curriculum with no notice or being moved from one grade to another after years of service, the teachers cited lack of support even in physical items, such as lack of supplies or having to make sure there are enough desks in the room. Some of them believe that much money is being wasted, and that the school administration is too politicized so that no real reform is possible. Lack of qualified substitute teachers was also discussed at length among the parents in the focus group. Parents expressed concern at the way substitute teachers are able to get a certificate for teaching without being really qualified to teach. Such concerns indicate the risk of a lack of trust on the part of everyone involved: teachers, administrators, and parents.

Specifically in reference to the teacher-parent relationship, teachers and parents both identified several risk factors: lack of respect and support for the teachers, lack of communication between parents and teachers, and lack of parental involvement in the children's schooling. Whereas the teachers spent more time addressing the lack of respect for education in the home culture, the parents identified lack of parental discipline as a significant risk factor, affecting both the atmosphere at the school and their own children, and they very strongly condemned the poor disciplinary methods they had observed in other parents and the lack of backup the teachers get from the parents.

The lack of communication between teachers and administrators and/or the higher school authorities is another pivotal concern of parents and teachers. Freire (1970) spoke to the paramount importance of communication, saying that “only through communication can human life hold meaning” (p. 77). He noted also that dialogical relations are indispensable to the capacity of change agents to cooperate in perceiving the same cognizable object; without such relations, effective change will be impossible.

In terms of cultural issues, the literature speaks widely of the world of diversity in the United States and the many barriers that ethnic minority and low-income families and children have to overcome. Such barriers can result in a lack of community, of people simply not knowing one another. One teacher brought up the issue of the lack of community—she has sometimes found out that there’s more support at home than she realizes, but the problem is she doesn’t know the families.

School climate is a critical issue that could represent a barrier to learning, and a variety of factors lends to climate. The teachers spoke of the recent school remodeling, indicating that architecture is very important in creating a conducive environment for learning, and all participants agreed that the school cafeteria, as one example, is not conducive to learning because it provides a setting for bad behavior. Many teachers also agreed that bringing the 5th and 6th grade student to a K-4 grade school changes the behavior dynamic of the school. The older students are often not good role models for the youngest students because the older students tend to create a lot of discipline problems, making a less respectful environment. Bronfenbrenner (1979) spoke to the profound effect of the environment on the developing person and the constraints of risk factors on this person.

In relation to school climate, one parent mentioned that the award assemblies had been abolished, and there was widespread agreement among the parents that these needed to be brought back as they had observed positive reinforcement working well with the kids. Nevertheless, the parents did seem to have a low level of awareness about such services, which was noticeable throughout the interview, because there were a few other issues about which the parents did not seem to be knowledgeable. Perhaps this issue needs to be addressed by the school administration as it is evidence of the need for an open channel of communication, not just within the school, but with the school community as whole.

The parents also felt that there is a problem with an unwelcoming climate in the school. A parent said, “I just don’t feel it’s a welcoming environment for everyone. Everyone doesn’t necessarily feel welcome. And that starts from when you walk in the door.” The participants unanimously agreed that this perception may be an issue for some, especially parents who are intimidated merely by the school setting, based on their experiences growing up. In particular, they agreed that parents are often made to feel as if they are “a bother.” Van Manen’s (1990) lived space existential speaks to the need for a place where the child is free to safely explore the world, and lived relation the one in which the child experiences a sense of support and security that helps him or her to become a mature and independent person. Such an application is not just for children, as parents have these needs to some degree also. Parents and teachers in this study spoke about the intimidated or shy parent and identified those parents’ own negative school experiences as barriers that may be affecting positive relationships with teachers, along

with a lack of understanding concerning how to interact effectively with the educational system (Hartman & Chesley, 1998).

Bronfenbrenner (1990) identified hopes and dreams as essential themes of the experience of teaching. In response to a question about their hopes and dreams for the children, the teachers engaged in a fair bit of discussion about their hopes in both the private interviews and the focus group, but the parents had somewhat less to say, thus tacitly identifying a certain lack of hope as a risk factor. Parental anxieties emerged about preparedness for further education, as most of their hopes focused on wanting their children to be prepared to go to college. The parents seemed keenly aware of the fact that many kids are not prepared to enter college and that the freshman dropout rate is very high. Thus, preparedness—and anxiety that the kids would not be prepared to compete in the real world—emerged as a major concern, particularly of parents, almost to the point where it seemed to dim their hopes for their children. In this context, one of the parents also mentioned that he would hope the children could learn better because the tests are “stressful.”

In the same context of preparedness, the parents noted that everything seemed to come down to money as they discussed the fact that there is a beautiful new computer lab in the school but no one hired to teach computer skills. As one parent said, “technology is a big part of our civilization right now, and that needs to be fixed. I guess that would be an issue I would have. Yeah. Yeah, they need to find a teacher to do a computer course for these kids. ‘Cause it has to start at an early age.”

Lack of empathy, though the word itself was not spoken, emerged as a source of anxiety. One aspect often mentioned by the teachers is the human need to listen and be

listened to. Listening is one of the activities of an empathetic person. The teachers spoke of the need for parents to talk to their children about “listening to the teachers.” When the teachers expressed their desire for support and communication from the administrators, one of them said that “they should listen” when the teachers are having problems.

Some of the parents, in their turn, expressed great empathy with the teachers. They expressed dissatisfaction that the teachers are moved frequently with little notice. They felt that this was mistreatment of the teachers on the part of the administration. They understood that teachers might need to be moved so that they could keep their passion for their jobs, but they also felt that if teachers were doing a good job and didn’t wish to be moved, they shouldn’t be moved.

Empathy and respect are so closely linked that it is almost impossible to experience one in the absence of the other. The literature speaks about the need for the caregiver and teacher in particular to model desired behavior for children. Gordon (2009) asserted that human beings are born with the capacity for empathy and for recognizing human emotions beyond race, culture, nationality, social class and age. Freire (1970) stated that the most effective way to learn is through reflection and praxis. This is a pivotal practice in the mental health field and should be mandated in school settings. These ideas from the literature were reflected in teachers’ expressions of the need for parents to teach their children such basic attitudes as respect. They also talked about their desire for the parents to be respectful of the teacher and the school.

In the discussion on student preparedness, the teachers, in particular, raised the issue of lack of respect. The teachers spoke about their responsibility to prepare the students, providing them with the appropriate knowledge and skills that will help them to

be successful as they move on in their schooling. However, they expressed frustration because they feel that their opinion about the students' preparedness is not valued. Ultimately, the decision belongs to the parents as to whether a child who should perhaps be held back should advance a grade, and the administration usually acquiesces to the parents' wishes. Then, the teachers feel that their professional integrity has been violated and that they are not respected as the experts.

Yet another risk factor identified was lack of parental knowledge. In talking about the curriculum changes and identifying the value of parent involvement, as well as noting their ongoing efforts to reach and connect with parents, most of the teachers, even as they observed that parents can be very defensive, were in agreement that the parents don't always know what their job is.

Research Question 4

"What potential protective factors are associated with parent-teacher engagement as they are involved in their children's and students' educational processes?" Three of the themes addressed this question: communication, empathy, and hope. These three themes express the dynamic desirable among the members of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) microsystem as the parent and teacher help fulfill the children's social, emotional, and intellectual needs.

The teachers were very strong in identifying parental involvement as a protective factor for children in such practical aspects as at least making sure the kids get to school, are fed, and have plenty of sleep. Beyond that, they need to make sure the children do their homework. In the discussion on this issue, a strong protective factor that emerged was an encouraging parental attitude toward education.

As the teachers discussed their perceived relationship to their students' parents and how they want their students' parents to be involved, one teacher mentioned that there is sometimes more support at home than she thinks, but she doesn't know the family. They agreed that establishing a good relationship with the parents is important, and that they should take care not to let it be adversarial. In the focus group, there was discussion on the need for community so that people know each other. At least two other teachers mentioned that when they call the parents with a problem, they mention something good about the child first so that the parents will not feel attacked, and one teacher even asks the parents if they've observed anything in the child's behavior at home and, consequently, if they can offer any suggestions for helping the child out.

They also spoke about the profoundly positive impact of parental involvement in the management of children's discipline. El Nokali, Bachman, and Votruba-Drzal (2010) wrote of the effect of parent involvement on helping to reduce behavioral problems and to improve social skills. When a parent is involved, both the child and the teacher gain a sense of security; the teacher, in particular, knows the parent is available to support and help address issues that involve the child. Freire (1970) spoke to the need for parental involvement and spoke of the need for regular meetings with parents and teachers through Parent and Teacher Association (PTA). He further explained that parents can take an active role by organizing workshops for parents and other similar activities such as PTA search for full funding to improve quality of teachers, and support the capabilities for school to strive.

In their responses to the same questions, the parents, from their perspective, tended to meet the teachers half way in terms of what they feel is needed to protect their

children. Whereas they perceive many of the teachers as interested and caring, they identified the element of time in communications as important. They tend to assume, if they hear nothing from the teachers, that the child is doing well, and then they are surprised if the child gets a bad grade. Several expressed the idea that a phone call from the teacher would be nice, and one person observed that he does better with face-to-face contact than with e-mails.

The parents and teachers were also unanimous in saying that communication was needed on several levels: from teachers to parents, from parents to teachers, between parents and children, and between administrators and teachers. The parents referred to concrete means of communicating that they liked—"letters...updates...calendars"—and they were unhappy that these had been eliminated. A parent spoke of one teacher who sent an automatic text at the end of each school day, letting the parents know about the homework assignment, and most agreed that such a system would help. The parents expressed approval for a new evaluation policy whereby the teachers are required to make phone calls to the parents and document kids' behavior, whether they're good or bad. They also suggested that the timing of parent-teacher conferences is important—they felt that meetings between parents and teachers shouldn't be limited to the first of the school year. Parents asserted that regular parent-teacher conferences should be offered, and the teachers need to communicate to the parents if there's a problem.

The teachers, on their part, were very positive about their relationship with the parents they actually meet. The teachers desire a strong and communicative relationship with parents. The teachers frequently alluded, albeit somewhat indirectly, to the need for and protective value of parental communication with the children. Parents need to read to

their children and listen to their children read, help the children with their homework, place importance on education.

In terms of empathy, Gordon (2009) asserted that “[t]he ability to find the humanity in one another will change the way that we relate to one another” (p. 8). She pointed out two pivotal points in working with families and their children: that (1) children develop within the culture of their family, and there is a need to work with that rather than against it, and that (2) it is the relationship rather than the structure of families that counts. In the interviews, it became apparent, on the positive side, that one of the strongest manifestations of parent-teacher engagement emerged in terms of empathetic/sympathetic understanding. On the negative side, almost all of the complaints that were voiced, as well as desires expressed for greater support and respect, could be traced back to a lack of human understanding, kindness, and empathy.

Hope for the children’s schooling emerged as a strong protective factor as both teachers and parents were asked what hopes and dreams they have for their students. In the Teacher Focus Group, the immediate answer was that the students would be “proficient”—that is, “benchmark.” As the discussion continued, another teacher expressed a desire for the children to “like school.” One teacher mentioned that she hoped for social and emotional growth. This expressed hope comes close to what the goal of education should be: “The goal of education is broader than creating job-ready youth; it involves nurturing individuals who can be publicly useful and personally fulfilled” (Gordon, 2009, p. xix).

Research Question 5

The fifth and last research question was “What are the roles of parents in children’s learning in elementary school?” The themes of support and empathy, along with communication, again emerged as part of the answer to this research question. Teachers perceive the parents’ role as being very important, even vital. The parents are a support system for making sure the children get to school, are fed, and get plenty of sleep; ensuring that the children do their homework; and encouraging a positive attitude toward school.

The idea of the child as dwelling within a support system is borne out in the literature that formed the theoretical framework for this study. Many scholars have, for years, addressed the pivotal role of the environment on the developing child. Kurt Lewin’s (1931, 1935, 1951) works, for example, concentrate on how the environment is perceived by the person who interacts within and with it (as cited in Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 23). The ecological environment is conceived topologically as a nested arrangement of concentric structures, each contained within the next. Bronfenbrenner referred to these structures as micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems. A deeper overview of these ecological systems is presented in previous chapters of this study. In their unanimous agreement that children need a support system provided at home to meet their basic needs (nutrition, sleep, hygiene, etc.), the teachers implicitly identified the microsystem as the most important. That this support system is paramount has also been indicated by van Manen (1990, 1991) and Schneider & Coleman (1993), among others experts in the field. If there is a lack of parent involvement, or if the parents play a disruptive rather than a supportive role in this triadic system (parent, child, teacher), the

learning process crumbles or breaks down: “like a three-legged stool, it is more easily upset if one leg is broken or shorter than the others” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 5). Based on this notion I developed Figure 1, which shows a three-legged stool depicting the six ecological systems addressed under Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological theoretical model. The structure of the ecology is perceived to extend far beyond the immediate situation directly affecting the developing person. Equally important are (1) the connections between others present in the setting, (2) the essence of these links, and (3) their direct influence on the developing person through their effect on those who deal with the developing person firsthand. This constellation of interaction is referred as the microsystem.

In this child support system, the parent and teacher legs are located on left and right, and the child in the center. The quality of the support and coaching/knowledge that flows from the left and right legs determines the level of enjoyment and success of the center leg, the child, helping the child’s social, emotional, and intellectual learning blossom. This dyadic relationship is essential for the upbringing of a child. Gordon (2009) asserted, “It is the relationship rather than the structure of families that count” (p. xviii).

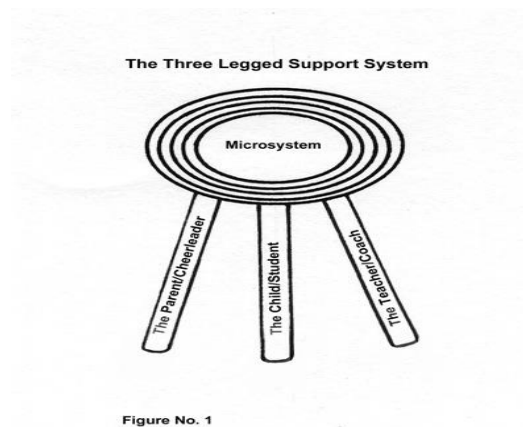


Figure 1. Adapted from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Concept of the Three-Legged Stool (p. 5).

The teachers also strongly implied a need for empathy in the role of the parents in their children's education. Parents need to provide a positive home environment for their children in which the parents are "motivators and enforcers. They need to motivate their children to get to school on time, to be prepared. They have to be cheerleaders for them, to let them know that, that they value education." Parents "motivate their children to want to learn and enforce some simple rules so that they, they actually get their school work done." Teachers also agreed that they themselves must be empathetic toward the parents in terms of "coaching the parents and giving them the encouragement and tips on how to help their students out." Being a parent is the most challenging and yet rewarding job there is.

Theoretical Implications

Architectural Considerations for School Remodeling

The teachers talked about the small square footage and design of the building as a risk factor; however, as they shared their lived space experiences with the school

remodeling, the new air conditioning, and the smart board, these items emerged as protective factors because this aspect of the remodeling brought them some comfort and the opportunity to enhance their teaching. It was also exciting to have a brand new playground. The cafeteria design brought some criticism, however, as well as the placement of the lockers and the fact that the school had been combined to support K – 6 rather than K – 4.

Coping During Curriculum Changes

According to Patrikakou, Weisberg, Redding, and Walberg (2005), studies have been conducted under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) to examine the role of parents in their children's learning. The findings show, in general, that parents are more involved at home when the school provides them with the necessary home learning materials, when they have open communication with schools, and when they participate in learning compacts and other aspects of a comprehensive program. A deficit of this urban elementary school is the lack the financial resources to help provide families with learning resources to help their children at home. Various authors also indicate that state evaluations have been conducted to identify barriers to greater parental involvement, particularly for families and children with economic disadvantages, disabilities, minority background, or limited English proficiency. These barriers include lack of time on the part of parents and school staff, followed by lack of staff training. These two findings were a critical concern for parents and teachers in the current study.

Curriculum, which originally intended as a protective factor to enhance children's learning, has become a risk factor. All participants in this study expressed deep concern about the curriculum changes. In particular the teachers reported a variety of issues, (e.g.

not feeling adequately trained) with the curriculum review process. The findings here indicated that the administrators' failure to implement curriculum changes correctly contributes to a pedagogy of the oppressed concerning this particular group of students in this urban elementary school (Freire, 1970), as previously explained.

Implications for the Principals' Roles

Effective curriculum changes cannot be disconnected from the very people who have the best interest of the children at heart. As in any other system, there is always a hierarchical order, and in the school setting, the principals set the tone for the school climate. Even though I did not include administrators in my study, the participants addressed factors consistent with the organizational literature in supporting the role of the administrators as setting the tone for the culture. In this urban elementary school, however, the principals have not done that, though it is essential in order to help reconstitute the new curriculum culture.

NEA President Dennis van Roekel (2008) wrote that the leadership role of a school principal is critical in shaping the teaching, learning, and general school environment. He further explained that the most effective principals create vibrant learning in a community where faculty and staff collaborate to help all students fulfill their potential. Wolf (1996) described a learning community as a "group of people who come together for a common purpose in a spirit of helpfulness and harmony" (p. 52). Wolf further identified several characteristics of such a learning community: (a) By nature, a community is inclusive rather than exclusive; (b) A person must first feel welcomed simply as he or she is; (c) It is a safe place to share weaknesses; (d) The community breeds helpfulness, strength, intimacy and a special kind of shared laughter

that comes from knowing each other well and looking at situations from the same perspective; (e) Open communication must prevail; and, (f) All members of the community must feel it is a “safe place” to express their feelings and concerns without the threat of retaliation. Wolf emphasized that the sense of community among staff is “a prerequisite to all other forms of community that are desirable” (p. 83).

Although principals wear many different hats during the school day, the most effective of them are managers, disciplinarians, and instructional leaders for the school. Successful principals (a) provide a common vision of what good instruction looks like, (b) support teachers with the help and resources they need to be effective in their classrooms, and (c) monitor the performance of teachers and students, with an eye always on the overall goal (Christensen, 1994; van Roekel, 2008).

Kathleen Trail (2000), in writing about the many roles of a principal, identified 11 hats that principals wear. She described these 11 hats as follows:

1. The psychology hat. Principals make themselves accessible to every student and teacher, acting as a sounding board for both ideas and emotions. By listening to what teachers and students are saying, a principal can continuously take stock of the school culture and use feedback to make reform efforts more effective.
2. The teacher hat. Principals provide valuable insight into the challenges teachers face in the classroom. The principal’s knowledge about research supports a school’s reform model.
3. The philosopher hat. Principals must work to include all of the stakeholders throughout all changes, not only to achieve the buy-in of the stakeholders, but

- also to foster an increased sense of empowerment and greater potential for the long-term sustainability of the school's reform efforts.
4. The facility manager hat. Principals' role in overseeing the physical structures of the school is key. The physical aspects of a school need to reflect the vision for reform.
 5. The police officer hat. Principals' job is to create a safe school environment, to make their presence known by "walking their beats," and to "keep the peace" through conflict-resolution and mediation.
 6. The diplomat hat. The principal acts as a liaison with the various stakeholders throughout the implementation of a reform program. A principal's diplomacy often comes into play. Interaction with district personnel and superintendents is crucial in helping to ensure that policies and resources are in place so that the school's internal change climate can flourish.
 7. The social worker hat. The principal can encompass work in fostering collaboration with families and other community groups to support students. Another part of the principal's role as social worker is to establish a safe and comfortable environment, not only one in which students can grow academically and emotionally, but also where teachers and staff can take risks and stretch professionally within the context of school change.
 8. The mentor hat. A principal shares professional knowledge with teachers. The role of mentor is particularly important for principals to take on when implementing change, not only because of their instructional experience but also because they can see the big picture. They are aware of the culture of the school

and the issues facing other teachers, particularly those challenges related to reform.

9. The director hat. Principals spend significant chunks of their time working in a public relations capacity to ensure commitment from the parents and community alike.
10. The coach hat. Similar to a sports coach, a principal creates a vision, sets goals, builds a strong team of teachers, encourages skill building and continuous learning, assesses performance by looking at data, and provides inspiration.
11. The cheerleader hat. As in any workplace, the principal's recognition of staff accomplishments promotes an effective work environment.

Both van Roekel (2008) and Trial (2000) have asserted that school principals wear many hats and that each of these obliges a unique set of tasks. The principal's style of wearing these hats will profoundly affect any school reform. Reflecting on the overriding themes of this study (need for communication, empathy, aspects of oppression, and cultural issues and school climate) and on the tasks connected to each of the principal's hats, it is fair to say that activating the principal's social worker hat would have a profound impact in the building of the urban elementary community in this study.

Implications for Parental Roles

A significant body of literature supports the potential impact of parent involvement in their children's schooling (Epstein, 2011; Patrikakou et al., 2005). The review of the literature has addressed the essence of environmental influences in the developing child. Van Manen (1990) pointed to the profound importance of the need for

a parent and teacher pedagogical relationship that focuses on the special relationship between them as they engage in educating the child. Van Manen further explains that this pedagogical relationship is best described when that relation is “pregnant with certain qualities.” Therefore, supporting a child entails an adult’s being reliable enough to be counted on to be there dependably and in a continuing way. This matter represents a serious challenge for many modern families and schools (van Manen, 1991, p. 59).

The teachers and parents participating in this study strongly value their relationship, seeing it as a protective factor. Both parents and teachers reported it is a tremendous relief to know that they can call one another regarding any concern with the children, whether behavioral or academic, and that they will work together in helping the children. These involved parents and teachers perceive “preparing” the child as a very important and yet challenge task. All of the participants expressed concern about the preparedness or educational training of those children of the uninvolved parents, particularly the intimidated or shy parents.

Though the literature review overwhelmingly demonstrated the needs of these children and their families, a limited number of studies have been done on the lived experiences of these children and their families. The literature review also addressed the lack of community resources and training for these families in meeting the educational needs of their disfranchised children. The teachers talked about their successes as they connect with the parents. They shared their approaches to building relationship with the families and shared their experiences in working with difficult parents, such as ways they handle occasional parents’ outbursts or defensive behavior. Some of the teachers

observed that their training and experience in working with difficult customers has helped them relate to parents.

Listening to the teachers' observations raises questions about their training with regard to their awareness and understanding of the power of poverty or illiteracy, which many of the families in this community experience. I also wonder if the uninvolved/intimidated or shy parents' behavior is a result of more than simply previous negative experience with their own schooling or previous experience working with the school system. Is it perhaps related to other characteristics, such as literacy or cultural and/or language barriers? These factors have been associated with members of this community isolation and poor access to services. One participant said,

I feel that if I know about my parents, I'll know about my kid. My student. And I'll know why different things happen the way that they do in the child's life. Some of my children, when they come to school, sometimes they don't have a good morning. They don't have a good day. And I've always told them, "If there's anything that they want to talk about, come up to my desk before we start class." And that's what they'll do. They'll come up and we'll talk. And I'll, I try to ensure them, to assure them in different situations. That's why I want to learn my parents. I want to know what's going on at home and what they do and how involved they are with their child. There's a lot of parents that are not together. Living together. And that's a big difference because you're, you're going to have a child that's going to lash out. Whether it's being disobedient or just lashing out with other children. You're going to have different behaviors.

Freire (1993) spoke to this teacher's argument, indicating that "for the coherent progressive educator, the necessary teaching of content will always be associated with a 'critical reading' of reality" (p. 24). Freire explained further that for this educator "it is not possible to minimize, and dismiss the knowledge from lived experiences, that students bring to school." Educators use the student's knowledge as well as knowledge of a scientific nature to make learning understandable. He indicated that "it is through the knowledge of lived experiences that one reaches the so-called exact knowledge" (Freire, 1993, p. 24).

According to van Manen (1991), the presence of adults may make it possible for the child to experience a sense of safety, support, stability, and direction—hence a child's possible negative reaction if the parents are not living together. Though these pedagogical themes recur in the literature of child care and pedagogy, knowledge of these themes does not allow to make generalized judgments about how particular children experience divorce or loss. However, the understanding of the pedagogical significance of such themes in terms of the child's healthy growth and development may help in the interpretation of the meaning of those conditions in the specific life contexts of specific children. Reflecting on the life contexts of children, and on the significance of the values embedded within them may help us to heighten our pedagogical thoughtfulness and increase the likelihood of demonstrating appropriate pedagogical understanding in our everyday living with children (van Manen, 1991, p. 55).

The essence of pedagogy manifests itself in the practical moment of a concrete situation....knowledge necessary for pedagogical action needs to be situation-specific and oriented to the particular child with whom we are concerned. In

other words, pedagogy is context sensitive... Teachers who are pedagogically sensitive to children also tend to be sensitive to the backgrounds, the life-histories of the children, and the particular qualities and circumstances of the children for whom they have responsibility. (van Manen, 1991, pp. 47–48)

It is a crucial for the educator to understand a child's learning and development in the context of the larger biography of the child. Indeed, understanding the significance of these children's lives may go some way toward appropriate future pedagogical action in one's relations with such children (van Manen 1991, p. 53). In the other hand, Bronfenbrenner (1979) explained that

...development is a lasting change in the way in which a person perceives and deals with his environment...the ecological environment is conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls. At the innermost level is the immediate setting containing the developing person...it requires looking beyond single settings to the relations between them...such interconnections can be as decisive for development as events taking place within a given setting. A child's ability to learn to read in the primary grades may depend no less on how he is taught than on the existence and nature of ties between the school and the home. (p. 3).

Participants talked about the parents' role as support system in providing good parenting for their children: they need to keep an open channel of communication with their children's teacher/school; cheerlead the children, talking to them about the importance of education and enforce the children's academic life, making sure they do

the homework; and discipline the children to listen and respect the school, receiving coaching from the teachers when necessary.

The urban school community where this study took place is impoverished, affected by many variables (level of education, family income, single parent home, etc.), as demonstrated in Chapter I. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) work on the ecology of human development spoke to the implications of these factors, indicating that whether parents can perform effectively in their child-rearing roles within the family depends on role demands, stresses, and supports emanating from other settings. The parents' evaluations of their own capacity to function and their view of their children are related to such external factors as flexibility of job schedules, adequacy of child care arrangements, the presence of friends and neighbors who can help out in large and small emergencies, the quality of health and social services, and neighborhood safety. Of paramount importance for these families and their children is the availability of supportive settings, which can be "enhanced by the adoption of public policies and practices that create additional settings and societal roles conducive to family life" (Bronfenbrenner 1979, p. 7).

As the participants asserted, the child's learning starts at home: "It's the foundation," and the "child's first teacher is the parents" (this is supported by Pestalozzi in the 1894). Using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) nested Russian doll metaphor, the innermost layer, the smallest doll, is the developing person (p. 3). Bronfenbrenner further explained that the ecological environment extends far beyond the immediate situation directly affecting the developing person. Of particular interest in the current study is the presence of the teacher and the parent with whom the child has face-to-face interaction. The child's connections with other people present in the setting are equally important, as they

have an indirect influence on the developing person through their effect on those who deal with him at first hand. The makeup of the interaction within the immediate setting is referred as the *microsystem* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Implications for the School Counselor

The literature speaks to the need to address the barriers often experienced by low-income and minority status families, in particular (Epstein 2001; Patrikakou, Weissburg, Redding, & Walberg 2005). To address such needs, the CACREP 2009 Standards require that school counselors embrace a new role as promoters of effective teamwork within the school and community. The findings of this study would indicate that such a new role for counselors is greatly needed and that it could prove quite effective in addressing some of the problems identified here.

The school counselor may function as a system change agent in a leadership role designed with ethnic and multiculturally sensitive strategies to enhance the learning environment of schools. Because of the quality of training, the school counselor, with the support and collaboration of the school administrator, may be a tremendous help in facilitating and providing for the needed support to parents and teachers as they engage in teaching the students. The counselor has the capacity to work with guardians and families to act on behalf of their children by way of addressing the problems that affect student success in school. The counselor can collaborate with families to access available resources in the school community to improve student academic achievement and success. He or she can also use strategies to promote, develop, and enhance effective teamwork within the school and the larger community. School counselors have the capacity to advocate for school policies, programs, and services that enhance a positive school climate that is equitable and responsive to multicultural student populations. The school counselors can undertake a leadership role in strengthening the relationships among schools by implementing community centered strategies for parent involvement.

These strategies respect community culture and parents' abilities to contribute to their children's education, connecting the dots of strengthening home school relationships and teamwork to help overcome the demographic and psychological barriers to school involvement and the barriers related to teacher attitudes and school climate.

Potential Hypotheses Derived from this Study

The data drawn from responses to the research questions for this study has provided answers. Nevertheless, these findings elicit many questions. The following are potential hypotheses drawn from the data analysis and discussion. These hypotheses suggest a relationship between variables, as well as a direction for that relationship. Even though many of the hypotheses also imply causality, testing the cause and effect of the variables through quantitative methods may be a challenge.

1. Training programs are not adequate in preparing teachers to work with disenfranchised students and families.
2. Lack of communication, training, and support hinder the implementation of the curriculum.
3. The unfriendly and unwelcoming school atmosphere is a barrier to parent involvement.
4. Lack of community awareness hinders the parent-teacher engagement in the students' learning processes.

Recommendations and Questions for Future Research

During this study, a few aspects were identified for further research. The participants, teachers and parents alike, identified characteristics of the group discussion that they found would greatly benefit their engagement in the children's educational

processes. A main concern that teachers and parents discussed was the children's discipline; however, only one teacher mentioned the profound importance of the children's need for social emotional growth. Both teachers and parents, as they discuss their frustration with lack of support and communication, voiced their concern for intimidated or shy parents and children that fall through the cracks and who, at the end, do not even know how to read. These issues are of paramount concern for the future of all children, especially impoverished and minority children. Much quantitative research has been done in these areas, but further qualitative research needs to be done to find answers and provide the appropriate services to these children and their families.

Teachers talked about the value of the parent and teacher relationship and spoke of how difficult it is when they are not successful at connecting with parents, particularly with those that, for one reason or another feel intimidated about school. The student body in this urban school community is 70% African American, and 80% of the teachers are Caucasian. Though the work of many experts in the field addresses these concerns (Delpit 1995, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994), more research is needed in these areas.

The following questions generated by this research can be used also as a springboard for further research.

1. Are colleges and universities preparing teachers with the needed skills to teach children more effectively and to work with disenfranchised children and their families?
2. What is being done to train parents with the basic skills and resources to help their children in the learning processes?
3. How effectively is the social emotional skills curriculum being taught?

4. Is there an open channel of communication between the different layers (systems) of the school community?
5. How can we create an environment where enthusiastic engagement among the different involved systems (school, home, and community) takes place?
6. Would it be possible to teach “parent skills” for parenting, homework support, and problem solving?
7. Who is responsible for providing children with social and emotional knowledge and skills?
8. In this powerful country with a crippled educational budget, what is the hierarchical place of children and their families?
9. Is fair and just to provide a welfare food stamp and medical insurance to the families?
10. Is it fair to ignore families and children suffering and not provide them the appropriate knowledge, skills and resources?
11. In this world driven by technology, are the children provided with the skills they need to navigate the world?

Limitations of the Study

This is a qualitative study involving eight teachers who are currently teaching at the elementary school and nine parents who have at least one child enrolled at the elementary school. The group was fairly diverse in terms of years of teaching experience (from 9 to 23 years), race (seven African Americans, 10 Caucasians), and gender (two males, 15 females). This diversity and representation of the sample population may provide a meaningful contribution to the findings.

The main limitation of this study is its lack of ability to be generalized (van Manen, 1990). The target sample for this study is a small sample of teachers and parents. At this western Pennsylvania school, 70% of the student body population is low-income and African American, and the majority of the teachers are white, middle-class persons who may not always understand the needs of at-risk children. Conversely, the parents may not always understand why the school is doing what it is doing. Thus, there may be both cultural and ideological differences. Researchers have also pointed to the failure of colleges and universities to provide teachers with the appropriate training to work effectively with disfranchised children and their families (Fullan, 1993).

My own presence may have created a limitation, owing to the fact that I am bilingual and bi-cultural, English is my second language, and I have an accentuated Spanish/English accent. According to Patton (2002) and (Levers, 2001), the researcher is an instrument and this characteristic can have an effect on how the researcher is received in the setting under study. I have around 11 years' prior experience as a psychotherapist, and I have been an elementary school counselor for the past 9 years. Therefore, some of the evaluator effects I bring to the research include my own ideas of the work, which I attempted to mitigate through the use of a reflective journal and consultation with my peers and mentors. I am a co-worker to the teachers and the counselor to the parents' children; therefore, I may also have had an influence upon the participants in this study. The anxieties that surround an evaluation can alter the participants' reactions, inducing them to be complacent or to give answers in a way that they think is expected (Patton, 2002). Nevertheless, the participants may also have felt comfortable and completely honest because the information being collected was directly related to their work or to

their daily lives. Participants' answer can also be influenced by underlying insecurities. Another significant limitation is pertinent to the participant demographic. Teacher participants were mostly white female veteran teachers with more than eleven years teaching experience in the elementary school. Although teachers are as important to successful reform as parents, their attitudes can create barriers for some school reform efforts. "Teachers have been sovereign within their own classrooms for a long time and many do not easily adopt new content or pedagogy; they become cynical when too many reforms are offered and tend to wait them out" (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003, p. 81).

Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative existential-phenomenological study was to understand parent and teacher engagement in terms of the following research question: "How do parents and teachers perceive the role of parental involvement in supporting children in a school that is undergoing child-centered pedagogical change, and how does parent-teacher engagement manifest itself?" The participants discussed their perceptions of the parents' role in their child's education, the effect of the school remodeling and the frequent curriculum changes on the students' behavior and academics, what teachers need from the parents to help their children to be successful with their schooling, their hopes for the students' schooling, their perception of their relationships, and the ways parents may be involved in their children's schooling.

Teachers are the primary change agents of any school change program; however, the literature is limited on teachers' input regarding experiences during a pedagogical program change and the effectiveness of the change. Freire (1970) asserts that the absence of teachers' input on the human side of pedagogical change may contribute to the

failure of the efforts. The current study's findings suggest that school administrators' attitudes are critical to teachers' success when the focus is on learning processes.

The participants in this study discussed a variety of concerns regarding curriculum changes. Teachers expressed concern about lack of support and timely and appropriate training, as well as indicating a strong desire for support and communication from both the parents and their supervisors. The parents discussed their difficulty in implementing curriculum changes at home and voiced concern about their children's lack of academic and behavior preparedness, and the unfriendly and welcoming school environment. One of the teachers spoke of the need for social and emotional learning on the part of the students. This matter has been addressed over time by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2005). After the Sandy Hook tragedy, President Obama (1/16/2013) called for increased mental health support in school settings. School counselors are well trained to teach students social emotional skills as well as to work with students in individual and group settings in addition to many other appropriate counselors' tasks; however, in many schools, counselors are often assigned inappropriate duties such as serving as the test coordinator, taking up cafeteria and bus duties, and serving as data entry clerks, etc. These inappropriate duties take time, reducing the school counselor's effectiveness in helping the students.

The findings in this study support the existing literature related to the question under consideration. School leaders and faculty may benefit by addressing the current study's findings in their curriculum pedagogical changes processes. The findings identified school leaders' duties and the attitudes that contribute to a successful change process, as well as elements of the curriculum pedagogical change process that promote

or hinder successful implementation of the curriculum change. The findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this current study may be generalized to urban elementary public schools in western Pennsylvania.

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APPENDIX A: ANNOUNCEMENTS PUBLICLY POSTED

DISSERTATION OR THESIS TITLE

Research on Parental Involvement: The Lived Experiences of Parents and Teachers

Recruiting Participants:

I need 10 parents and 10 teachers to participate in a focus group and possibly an individual interview. Participants will be asked to recount personal educational experiences and to answer a few questions about them. The interviews will take approximately 1.5 hours. In appreciation for your time, the parents and teachers in each group will be entered in a \$50 dollar gift card drawing. If you are interested, please contact Cristiana P. White at 724-407-8763 by September 20, 2013.

Thank you!

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board, Duquesne University



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APPENDIX B: LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Date

Dear Sir/Madame:

My name is Cristiana Perez White. I am a student at Duquesne University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania working on a doctoral degree in counseling, education and supervision. I am conducting a research study entitled “Parent-Teacher Engagement During Child-Centered Pedagogical Change in Elementary School: The Lived Experiences of Teachers and Involved Parents.” The purpose of the study is to explore the personal experiences of teachers and parents, and their perceptions of each other’s roles and the way in which parent-teacher engagement manifests as they both help students with their academic achievement.

Your participation will involve participating in a group and/or individual interview that will last for approximately 1.5 hours. The group and individual interview will be scheduled at a time convenient to you. The possible benefit of your participation is that the outcome of the study may give a voice to teachers and parents who participate in pedagogical school change, resulting in improved school pedagogical change, professional development, and improved relationships with school administrators. In gratitude for participating in this study, the parents and teachers in each group will be entered in a \$50 dollar gift card drawing. In this research, there is minimal risk, no greater risk than would be expected from everyday activities.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, you can do so without penalty or loss of benefit to yourself. The results of the research may be published, but your name will not be used, and your results will be maintained in confidence. This study has been reviewed and approved by the Duquesne University Institutional Reviewed Board (IRB). If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at 724-407-8763.

Thanks for your willingness to participate in this study,

Cristiana P. White

APPENDIX C: INQUIRY PROTOCOLS

The following protocols will be used for each set of interview.

Parent Focus Group

An induction protocol will be used that includes an explanation of the focus group interview process. The following semi-structured questions will be posed to the parents during the focus group interview:

8. As a parent of an elementary school-age child, what is your and your child's experience with his or her adjustment to the elementary school?
9. With the school remodeling and the frequent curriculum changes, how are your child's behavior and academics affected?
10. What do you need from your child's school to help him or her to be successful in school?
11. What are your hopes and dreams for your child's schooling?
12. How do you perceive your relationship with your child's teachers and school administrators?
13. How would you like to be involved in your child's education?
14. We have covered quite a number of crucial areas. Are there any other aspects that you would like to address that we have not yet covered?

Teacher Focus Groups

An induction protocol will be used that includes an explanation of the focus group interview process. The following questions will be posed to the teachers during the focus group interview:

8. As an elementary school teacher, how do you perceive the parents' role in their child's education?
9. How do you think the school's remodeling and the frequent curriculum changes affect the students' behavior and academics?
10. What do you need from the parents to help their children to be successful with their schooling?
11. What are your hopes for your students' schooling?
12. How do you perceive your relationship with your students' parents?
13. How would you like parents to be involved in their child's schooling?
14. We have covered quite a number of crucial areas. Are there any other aspects that you would like to address that we have not yet covered?

Parent Key Informant Interview

An induction protocol will be used that includes an explanation of the parent key informant interview. The semi-structured questions will be posed to parents during the key informant interview process.

1. As a parent of an elementary school-age child, what is your and your child's experience with his or her adjustment to the elementary school?
2. With the school remodeling and the frequent curriculum changes, how are your child's behavior and academics affected?
3. What do you need from your child's school to help him or her to be successful in school?
4. What are your hopes and dreams for your child's schooling?
5. How do you perceive your relationship with your child's teachers and school administrators?
6. How would you like to be involved in your child's education?
7. We have covered quite a number of crucial areas. Are there any other aspects that you would like to address that we have not yet covered?

Teacher Key Informant Interview

An induction protocol will be used that includes an explanation of the key informant interview process. The following questions will be posed to the teachers during the key informant interview:

1. As an elementary school teacher, how do you perceive the parents' role in their child's education?
2. How do you think the school's remodeling and the frequent curriculum changes affect the students' behavior and academics?
3. What do you need from the parents to help their children to be successful with their schooling?
4. What are your hopes for your students' schooling?
5. How do you perceive your relationship with your students' parents?
6. How would you like parents to be involved in their child's schooling?
7. We have covered quite a number of crucial areas. Are there any other aspects that you would like to address that we have not yet covered?

APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

The following identifiable information will be collected to communicate with participants during life of the data collection period to set up times for interviews and to send out consent forms:

1. Name
2. Phone number
3. E-mail address
4. Home address



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APPENDIX E: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE: Parent-Teacher Engagement During Child-Centered Pedagogical Change in Elementary School: The Lived Experiences of Teachers and Involved Parents

**INVESTIGATOR:
AND ADVISOR**

Dr. Lisa Lopez Levers
Duquesne University
School of Education
Dept. of Counseling, Psychology, and Special
Education
412-396-1871

CO-INVESTIGATOR:

Cristiana Perez White

251 Swearingen Road
Georgetown, PA 15043
724-407-8763

SOURCE OF SUPPORT:

This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the (doctoral or masters) degree in Doctor of Philosophy at Duquesne University.

PURPOSE:

You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to investigate the lived experiences of teachers and parents as they both help students with their academic achievement. Your participation will involve participating in a focus group and/or individual interview.

In addition, you will be asked to allow me to interview you. The interviews will last for approximately 1.5 hours and they will be video and audio taped and transcribed.

These are the only requests that will be made of you.

RISKS AND BENEFITS:

There is no risk to participating in this study, as you are simply being asked to share your lived experiences. There are no more risks to participating in this study than you would encounter in everyday life. The potential benefit to participating in this study is the contribution that this investigation may make to professionals understanding the experiences of parent and teachers during child-centered pedagogical change in elementary school. You may or may not experience emotional benefit from participating in this study.

COMPENSATION:

The parents and teachers in each group will be entered in a \$50 dollar gift card drawing in gratitude for participating in this study. Participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you. An envelope is provided for the return of your response to the investigator.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Your name will never appear on any survey or research instrument. No identification will be made in the data analysis. All written material, consent forms, and audio and video tapes, which are inherently identifiable by voice, will be stored in a locked file in the researcher's home. All identifying material, including information regarding anyone discussed in the interview will be deleted from the tapes at the time of transcription. The transcription will be done by a professional transcriber and shared with the researcher's dissertation committee. Portions of the transcription may be anonymously quoted as illustrations in the dissertation itself. All audio and video tapes will be destroyed immediately after the completion of the study. Written materials, such as transcripts and field notes, will be retained for no longer than five years. The information will be held confidential by the researcher; however, no guarantee can be made that participants in the focus groups will not disclose information outside of the group although it will be requested. Every effort will be made to stress

confidentiality to the participants throughout the process. Your response(s) will only appear in aggregated data summaries.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time. Should you choose to withdraw after engaging in a portion of the study, the researcher will not draw from or make any references to data that has been collected as a result of your individual participation.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:

A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT:

I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may call Cristiana Perez White at 724-407-8763; Dr. Lisa Lopez Levers, dissertation advisor, at 412-396-1871; or Dr. Linda Goodfellow, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board 412-396-6548.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date



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APPENDIX F: CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT OF PROFESSIONAL TRANSCRIPTIONIST

I, _____, am a professional transcriber. Cristiana P. White, a doctoral student at Duquesne University in the counseling, education and supervision, to read interview transcripts for the purpose of validating interpretations of a doctoral dissertation, has retained my services. By signing this form, I acknowledge that I will not discuss the contents of the interviews with any person in any manner, and I promise to hold the information in confidence.

Signature of
Transcriptionist _____ Date _____

Signature of Co-
Researcher _____ Date _____

APPENDIX G: PERMISSION LETTER TO USE PREMISES, NAME, AND/OR

SUBJECTS

This appendix has been removed in order to maintain the anonymity of this study App